REPORT RESUMES

ED 014 041 AC 001 648

HELPING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES THROUGH PARENT EDUCATION, A SURVEY OF RESEARCH.

BY- KRAFT, IVOR CHILMAN, CATHERINE S.

CHILDRENS BUREAU, WELFARE ADMIN., WASHINGTON, D.C.

PUB DATE 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.50 HC-$3.16 77P.

DESCRIPTORS- *PARENT EDUCATION, *LOW INCOME GROUPS, *FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION, *BEHAVIOR CHANGE, *PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS, ADULT EDUCATORS, LEADERSHIP STYLES, FAMILY SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP, FAMILY MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, DISCUSSION GROUPS, CONSUMER SCIENCE, ATTENDANCE, ATTENDANCE PATTERNS, RECRUITMENT, PARENT PARTICIPATION, HOMEMAKING EDUCATION, SURVEYS, MOTIVATION, HOMEMAKING SKILLS, EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGEMENT, PERSONAL VALUES, CURRICULUM PLANNING,

THE CHILD LIFE STUDIES BRANCH OF THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU MADE AN INFORMAL SURVEY OF PARENT EDUCATION FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1961 TO 1963. PARENT EDUCATION IS DESIGNED TO IMPROVE HOUSEKEEPING, STRENGTHEN INTERFAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, REINFORCE FAMILY-SCHOOL UNDERSTANDING, AND IMPROVE PERSONAL SKILLS. PRACTITIONERS RECOMMEND A BOLD AND ASSERTIVE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP AND THE MAINTENANCE OF FRANKNESS AND TRUST. AS A RESULT OF THE SURVEY AND REPORTS OF PROGRAMS, IT WAS FOUND THAT SOME PROGRAMS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL, INCLUDING DISCUSSION GROUPS, RECREATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND WORKSHOP TYPE ACTIVITIES. ACTIVITY PROGRAMS SEEMED TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN DISCUSSION. WORKERS REPORTED DIFFICULTIES IN ORGANIZING AND SUSTAINING PROGRAMS. THE ABSENCE OF OBJECTIVE METHODS OF EVALUATION MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO REPORT ON THE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS. SUCCESS WAS FREQUENTLY GAUGED NOT ACCORDING TO ANNOUNCED PRACTICAL GOALS BUT ACCORDING TO CERTAIN INFERRED THERAPEUTIC SIDE-EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION, SUCH AS SELF-CONFIDENCE. A FEW DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS OFFERED SLIGHT OR NO EVIDENCE THAT PARENT EDUCATION IS EFFECTIVE IN ALTERING ATTITUDES OR BEHAVIOR OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES. HIGHLY EXPERIENCED PARENT EDUCATORS SHOULD NOT UNDERTAKE SUCH EFFORTS EXCEPT ON THE BASIS OF CAREFUL AND CLEARLY ADEQUATE RESOURCES. (APPENDIX INCLUDES A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND A BIBLIOGRAPHY.) (AJ)

ED014041

a survey of research

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

HELPING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES THROUGH PARENT EDUCATION

U. S. DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH,
EDUCATION,
and WELFARE
WELFARE ADMINISTRATION
Children's Bureau
1966

AC001 648

HELPING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES THROUGH PARENT EDUCATION

a survey of research

by

Ivor Kraft and Catherine S. Chilman

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
WELFARE ADMINISTRATION
Children's Bureau
1966

American child rearing practices have changed considerably over the past three quarters of a century. Urbanization, increased mobility, improved education, and new knowledge about human growth and development are only some of the factors which have contributed to these changes. No doubt our children and grandchildren will find still newer methods of child care as our society continues to expand and change.

The majority of American mothers and fathers are alert to new information concerning the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of children. Books, pamphlets, and magazine articles in millions of copies are annually read by parents eager to achieve for themselves a more satisfying family life. American parents seek out advice on child management, join PTA's, attend lectures, and form study groups.

It is an unfortunate but undeniable fact that low-income parents are much less prone to seek information on child rearing, and take a much less active part in PTA's and parent groups. This fact has long been recognized by parent educators.

In 1961 the Child Life Studies Branch of the Children's Bureau decided to conduct an informal survey on parent education among low-income families in an effort to shed light on the promising as well as non-promising aspects of programs then underway in various parts of the country. This informal review was conducted through 1963, at a time when programs in this field were less numerous and less actively supported than they are today. A selective review of these programs appears in the Appendix of this study, on page 37.

The activities uncovered by the researchers took place in a variety of settings, and thus do not fall neatly into a single category with respect to focus or professional field. Also, it was found that the accepted definition of parent education, which differentiates it from certain casework and therapeutic practices, was not always followed consistently by the parent educators themselves.

Limitations of time and staff did not permit an all-inclusive research review. Thus, programs dealing with preparenthood courses, certain vocational and literacy projects, as well as public health classes for expectant mothers could not be included within the scope of the informal survey.

The authors have presented their objective findings and then accompanied these findings with a discussion of their possible significance and implications. There is ample evidence that parent education among low-income families requires of the practitioner and program planner much patience and advanced levels of skill. It is not yet clear, however, precisely what activities -- or combination of activities -- will make for the most appealing, productive, and long-lived programs.

Readers of this research report will no doubt be interested in a parallel Children's Bureau publication, Parent and Family-Life Education for Low-Income Families. While both publications are based on the same concept and working definition of parent education, the publication prepared under the auspices of the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth is intended to serve as a guide and handbook for practitioners, whereas the present report is a research-oriented study. Practice and research go hand in hand, and it is our hope that these two publications will stimulate other practitioners and researchers to deepen their inquiries into the broad field of parent education among low-income families.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION.. 1

Conducting the Informal Survey.............................. 2

Defining the Low-Income Clientele........................... 3

Defining the Parent Educator................................ 4

Limitations of the Review................................... 6

CHAPTER II
DIFFICULTIES REPORTED IN SUSTAINING PROGRAMS AND REACHING CLIENTELE.. 7

Poor Attendance: A Persistant Problem....................... 11

Fathers Are Hard to Reach................................... 13

Difficulties in Obtaining Objective Assessments............. 14

An effort to improve housekeeping......................... 15
A relocation project in Washington, D.C................... 16

CHAPTER III
PSYCHOLOGICAL OR THERAPEUTIC EFFECT OF THE PROGRAMS AS A MEASURE OF SUCCESS.. 17

CHAPTER IV
FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR PARENT EDUCATION AMONG THE POOR......... 20

Is Parent Education Essentially a Middle-Class Undertaking?.. 21

Inculcating Thrift and Habits of Wise Spending.............. 23

Activity Projects... 25

The Reluctance of Low-Income Adults to Seek Self-Improvement and Join Parent Education Groups....................... 29

Page

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY.. 35

APPENDIX
A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF SOME ON-GOING PROGRAMS................. 37

REFERENCES... 65

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Parent education for low-income families combines two enduring social concerns of American civic and intellectual life. The first, with its roots in the early decades of the 19th century, is the effort to mitigate through social and legislative reforms the underlying causes of poverty and economic disadvantage which have always afflicted a large proportion of working class families. The second, with somewhat newer roots in the last years of the 19th century, is the movement to provide scientifically and democratically sanctioned principles of child-rearing for American families, with the aim of making possible family life that is better planned, more creative, and satisfying. 1/

Even a very casual comparison of American society as it is today and as it was at the turn of the century reveals that both movements have made significant impacts in American life, although it may not

---

1/ The most recent comprehensive review of the field is Orville G. Brim, Jr., Education for Child Rearing (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959). An earlier survey is Helen L. Witmer, The Field of Parent Education: A Survey from the Viewpoint of Research (New York: National Council of Parent Education, 1934). Also useful for understanding the development of parent and family life education are the following: National Society for the Study of Education, Preschool and Parent Education, Twenty-eighth Yearbook (Bloomington, Ill.: Public School Publishing Co., 1929); Parent Education: Its Ends and Goals, Proceedings of the 1954 Conference for Workers in Parent Education, The Child Study Association of America, New York, 1954; and Lawrence K. Frank, "The Beginnings of Child Development and Family Life Education in the Twentieth Century," Edna Noble White Memorial Lecture, October 30, 1961, Merrill-Palmer Institute, Detroit, 1962. For further discussion on historical aspects of parent education, see pp. 41.ff.

be possible to establish the extent to which other technological and educational forces might have had a still deeper or prior influence on social change. In any event, it is clear that large segments of the working and deprived classes have acquired political, educational, and economic privileges and safeguards which were not the rule 60 years ago. It is also clear that many attitudes and pragmatic approaches to child-rearing which were common towards the close of the 19th century have been abandoned and replaced by newer concepts of effective child care, and probably will continue to be replaced.

In company with other public and private agencies, the Children's Bureau has concerned itself with the problem of determining the actual as well as potential role of parent education in the effort to advance the lot of low-income families in America. Towards this end, an informal effort was started in 1961 to review the various programs then under way that were directed primarily towards reaching parents within the low-income segments of the population.

Conducting the Informal Survey

The inquiry was carried out between October 1961 and October 1963. 2/ Between these dates individual letters of inquiry were sent to 107 practitioners, educators, and agency administrators in various parts of the country in an effort to obtain an informal but fairly representative coverage of kinds of programs then being conducted or in the launching stage. Respondents were asked to discuss the following topics:

a. The nature of activities in parent education among low-income clients either currently under way or being considered for implementation.

b. Successes, failures, and future prospects relative to such programs.

c. Leaders and other personnel engaged in the work, their attributes and methods of operation.

2/ The cutoff date for ongoing programs was December 1963. We have made use of published accounts appearing after this date when they have referred to programs which were active in the 1961-63 period.

d. Recommendations concerning useful techniques, approaches, and materials.

The letters of inquiry elicited 82 responses, varying from brief comments to the effect that no programs were known to the respondent all the way to detailed accounts and analyses of specific projects.

The survey by mail was supplemented with a series of 11 individual field trips undertaken by the authors in 1962 and 1963. Specialists and practitioners were interviewed, and parent discussion groups and activity programs were observed in the field. Also a number of interviews were conducted with specialists at national conferences and in the Washington office of the Children's Bureau.

In addition to the above efforts, we have made use of published reports of programs and research, although a definitive review of the literature was not attempted. 3/

Defining the Low-Income Clientele

No attempt was made to ascertain systematically the precise socioeconomic status of individual participants in the various group programs reported on in this review. In almost every case, however, it was clear from the published information and from the remarks of correspondents that the projects reviewed did indeed seek to reach a distinctly low-income clientele. In a large number of cases the participants in programs were welfare clients, unemployed, residents of housing projects, in-migrants from rural southern areas, individuals from minority ethnic groups, or otherwise identifiable as belonging to the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

At the time that this inquiry was being conducted a number of writers and researchers were calling forceful attention to the fact that there still persisted in the midst of a generally affluent American society large groups of low-income, deprived, or impoverished families. Commonly cited estimates of the number of Americans in the

---

3/ For an earlier, partial report on this survey, see Catherine S. Chilman and Ivor Kraft, "Helping Low-Income Parents Through Parent Education Groups," Children, Vol. 10, No. 4 (July-August 1963), pp. 127-132.

lower income or poor strata of the population varied from 30 to 40 million. 4/

Defining the Parent Educator

The American educational and cultural tradition does not include clearly defined concepts of "parentcraft" or "mothercraft" such as may exist in other societies. It is not possible to delineate the borders of education for parenthood with any precision or with reference to any widely accepted authority.

Although no consensus has yet been reached in defining the parent educator, in the literature on child study, family life education, and education for childrearing it is common to apply the designation broadly to a range of practitioners whose professional affiliation spans a variety of disciplines. 5/ These disciplines include education, social work, nursing, home economics, psychology, medicine, pastoral counseling, and many others.

Because of the nature and origins of present-day welfare programs in our country, the majority of professionals who are currently attempting to reach low-income parents come from the disciplines of social work, home economics, nursing, and education broadly conceived. It seems likely that practitioners from these fields will continue to predominate in direct work with multiproblem, deprived and disadvantaged families in the foreseeable future. It was therefore among such practitioners and from published materials deriving largely from these fields that we conducted our informal review.

4/ In his State of the Union message delivered early in 1963, President John F. Kennedy referred to 32 million Americans living in the outskirts of poverty. (U.S. House of Representatives, The State of the Union -- Address of the President of the United States; 88th Congress, 1st Session, Doc. No. 1, January 14, 1963.) For a recent, comprehensive treatment of income distribution in the United States, see Herman P. Miller, Rich Man, Poor Man (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1964).

5/ Brim, loc. cit. See also, Barbara Biber, "Basic Assumptions and Goals of Parent Education," in Taking Stock in Parent Education (Proceedings of the 1953 Conference for Workers in Parent Education, Child Study Association of America, New York, 1953); Ernest G. Osborne, "What Is A Parent Educator?" Child Study, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Fall 1956), pp. 4-9; and Aline B. Auerbach, "Trends and Techniques in Parent Education: A Critical Review," Child Study Association of America, New York, March 1961.

Even after we confine our attention to low income families only, no hard and fast rules can be put down for identifying the precise activities that are to be included under the umbrella-like term "parent education." It is clear that what many practitioners call family life education, parent-child counseling, casework with multiproblem families, and even group therapy would be admitted by other practitioners as legitimate occupations of the parent educator.

For purposes of this inquiry, parent education was defined as follows: An educational process directed toward adults chiefly in groups, with the goal of imparting knowledge (through a variety of methods and from a wide number of disciplines) so as to improve the physical, emotional, social, and economic life of the family. This definition differentiates parent education from individual or group counseling or therapy. While it may happen that the group educational process yields a therapeutic effect on some participating individuals at certain times, it is understood that education rather than therapy is the goal.

The above definition excludes a wide range of educational programs for adults which have as their main focus literacy, vocational skills, or academic education. Although such programs may well exert a positive effect on family life, they are not parent education in the sense of being primarily focused on family relations, child care, family budgeting, meal planning, and other tasks of family living.

The following specific activities were excluded from this inquiry:

a. Individual casework services, including those to multiproblem families, except in programs where the service is specifically labeled a parent or family life education undertaking.

b. Most kinds of literacy and vocational programs for migrants, the unemployed, or relocated adults.

c. Advice-giving and informal counseling of the sort that takes place between parents and various professionals, including physicians, nurses, teachers, and clergymen.

d. Well-child conferences and classes for expectant parents conducted under public health auspices.

Limitations of the Review

The informal inquiry was sufficiently broad and representative to enable us to present certain generalized impressions and conclusions. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the statements in succeeding chapters for the most part, apply to only a handful of programs. If we include within the general category of low-income population the highly conservative estimate of 30 million adults and children, then it is clear that only a fraction of one percent of this population was being reached in the programs discussed below in 1961-63. 6/

* * * *

Ensuing sections of this report present facts as well as impressions derived from our informal inquiry. Chapter II reviews obstacles and difficulties frequently encountered in reaching potential clients and sustaining the group efforts. The general prospects for success in reaching low-income families with the techniques of parent education are explored from various theoretical aspects in Chapter III. Chapter IV reviews future prospects for parent education among the poor. Finally, Chapter V offers a brief summary statement. The APPENDIX contains brief summaries of representative programs, followed by discussion of selected topics concerning the implementation and content of the programs.

6/ A less formal or restrictive definition of parent education would enable us to say that more adults were being reached. This would be so if we were to include most of the casework and informal counseling contacts, for example, where guidance on home management and child care is provided as tangential to the primary focus of the contact. Also, in order to view the scene in proper prospective, it must be pointed out that structured group educational undertakings intended for middle-class parents have at no time involved more than a small fraction of the middle-class population.

Chapter II

DIFFICULTIES REPORTED IN SUSTAINING PROGRAMS AND REACHING CLIENTELE

Most of the evidence and reports utilized for this study (see Appendix p.37) stress, understandably enough, the positive and successful aspects of the programs and attempts to reach low-income families. On a number of occasions, however, reference is made to unsuccessful or only moderately successful efforts. In a few cases outright failures are also reported but very rarely analyzed.

The following is a brief description typical of problems in low-income parent education:

> Hillside Housing Project is located in the central section of the city of Milwaukee and houses 636 families. Of these families, 90 percent are Negro, 54 percent receive some form of public assistance. The morale is very low. Attempts by the Milwaukee Recreation Department to provide programs for residents have little progress. As a result of a questionnaire, a group of 10 Hillside women met weekly during April and May 1961. The women indicated they were most interested in a clothing workshop. The program was initiated, but attendance was sporadic. The women who were faithful in attending did accomplish what they set out to do. One was very enthusiastic and finished several garments. She had never sewn before, so it was a real accomplishment for her. The group later had units on nutrition, meal planning, shopping, and food preparation. Classes continued until June 1962. Attendance continued to be small despite efforts to interest more people by sending out flyers, making personal visits, and establishing a nursery to care for young children.

In evaluating the program, it was found that women who attended benefitted greatly. The greatest problem is to motivate them to attend classes. [1]

The above straightforward description of a program is instructive for a number of reasons. The population is frankly characterized as being low in morale. Only 10 women out of 636 families were recruited to the program, and they attended only sporadically. Out of the 10, only one is described as being "very enthusiastic." Although the original focus of the program was broadened, presumably so as to make it attractive to additional women with other interests, and despite the fact that a considerable effort was made to interest more people, the attendance remained small. Finally, the chief problem is defined as one of low motivation.

The above description is also instructive because of what it does not say. It does not attribute lack of success to such factors as inadequate budget or facilities, absence of strong leadership, failure of communication, inaccessibility of the clients, inflexibility in approach, inadequacy of instructional materials, poor methodology, bad weather, failure to provide baby-sitting service, problems of health or mental illness, or inability to come up with a suitable program. The only reason cited for lack of success in implementing the program is the low motivation of the mothers.

The statement informs us that those women who attended "benefitted greatly," but we are not given any details of how these benefits were determined or assessed. The statement does make it clear that one woman learned how to sew, and that the group was exposed to units of instruction on aspects of home economics. No evidence is cited, however, to show that the women became better homemakers or improved in practice their homemaking skills and that this improvement was sustained for any given length of time or in any given areas of living. Also, no evidence is offered to indicate to what extent the concrete goals of the program were realized, or whether the achieved results were deemed a satisfactory return on the investment of time and effort.

---

[1] United States Department of Agriculture, Federal Extension Service, Cooperative Extension Service Work With Low-Income Families in Low Rent Public Housing (ESC-548), August 1963, p. 27.

Reports similar to that of the Hillside Housing Project in Milwaukee suggest that there are considerable difficulties in sponsoring a program in parent education among low-income clients. This viewpoint was frequently aired by informants, and a number of them doubted whether parent education in any form was basically suited as a technique for reaching low-income individuals.

A social worker and therapist based in New Orleans wrote that efforts were made in the past to reach low-income families via parent education but that they had led to failure, since it was usually impossible to get parents to attend meetings. This correspondent went on to say:

> In order to make use of parent education, one must have the possibility of a parent being physically present. In the large majority of low-income families the mother is employed at least part time and supervision of her children is left to neighbors, relatives, and older children in the family.... An ADC working mother with a sense of humor might enjoy an occasional meeting with an an expert and other mothers and learn about how necessary she is to her children when they come home from school. It would be unlikely that she could afford such an evening very often since, at the end of her own work day she must put in another work day in her own home. Perhaps some of the lack of response that we feel in many low-income parents who are invited to family life education programs is due to the fact that these parents may justly feel that we do not understand their problems and that the business of day-to-day living is so exhausting that there is little energy left for reflection.
>
> I do not mean to sound pessimistic about such programs and in my casework with low-income families I have often had the most gratifying experiences in educating families to a new point of view. But in my community where we cannot give families the minimal means and conditions of staying together it is obvious that many things are needed for the preservation of family life before parent education can be effective.

The following statement from the director of a social agency in Philadelphia expresses the difficulty of sustaining discussion groups:

> We tried to organize discussions with mothers of our nursery school children. Overhearing parents talking among themselves about bedwetting, stuttering, thumb-sucking, etc., we casually suggested that the mothers might want to meet as a group with our mental health consultant (a former pediatrician). The response was often quite positive. Two or three meetings were well attended. We introduced the Children's Bureau publication, "Your Child From One to Six," as a starting point, encouraging the group to read another paragraph at home and to return with questions next week. This was asking too much and the group soon petered out. The mothers came to us for quick solutions. Otherwise, a neighbor could just as well be used for advice.

In a 1960 Study of Adult Education in Metropolitan Detroit, it was found that family life education courses and activities, very broadly defined, reached a total of 17,000 individuals in a variety of public and voluntary schools and community agencies. In an analysis of the participation, however, it was concluded that "definitely, the low-income group in the city was not reached." 2/ This was attributed in part to the fact that fees were charged for most courses, and that the low-income segments of the population were in general hard to reach through normal publicity media.

A worker experienced in attempting to sponsor parent education activities in connection with urban renewal projects reported that despite very careful planning and many inducements, families do not appear to seek or welcome these services, and many are openly resistant to them. 3/ In a group discussion with experienced caseworkers and group workers attached to a large neighborhood center in New York City, the participants were asked to rank the various undertakings of the Center with respect to the promise they carried for improving family life in the low-income sectors of the city. It was the unanimous view of this group of practitioners that the parent education activities belonged at the bottom of the list.

2/ United Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit, "A Study of Adult Education in Detroit Agencies and Organizations -- Public and Voluntary," Detroit, Michigan, March 1960, p. 24.

3/ See also Leonard J. Duhl (ed.), The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), pp. 113-134, 229-258.

Poor Attendance: A Persistent Problem

Published reports as well as frank statements by workers made it amply clear that one of the chief, if not the chief, difficulty in organizing a parent education project among low-income clients was simply to assemble a group and then maintain adequate attendance at meetings over a number of weeks. By far the majority of projects do not appear to last longer than a maximum of 8 weeks, if that.

Often, success in maintaining attendance was itself seen as a major indication of a sound program. (See, for example, p.42 , "A Discussion Group in Connecticut"). Sometimes the criterion of adequate attendance appeared to be very minimal. The young married couples' club conducted by Wesley House Centers (see p.43), while reported as a successful undertaking, was never attended by more than six couples among a total of 34 prospective couples. Of these six, only three were reported as being regular and faithful participants. 4/

Many practitioners report that parents may quite readily express an interest in participating in various action programs or workshops suggested by social workers and parent educators, but that it is often difficult to bring the program into actuality because those who express an interest in having it do not later bother to attend even well-prepared and well-publicized meetings. In the Lakeview Cooperative Play Program in East Chicago, Indiana, to cite one example, a careful survey was conducted and 15 mothers expressed an interest in a clothing and sewing class. But of these 15 only 4 actually attended a single meeting. 5/

Below we summarize briefly a number of representative experiences in which attendance could not be secured or maintained.

An informal discussion group for 17 Negro ADC mothers was conducted in 1963 by two caseworkers with the Monroe County (New York) Department of Social Welfare. The aim was to explore and alleviate specific problems of daily life in a slum environment. The 17 mothers

---

4/ Georgiana McLarnan and Francis B. Neiswender, "Social Group Work With Young, Young Married Couples," The Elizabeth Nairn Memorial Paper presented at the Middle Tennessee Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, April 1961 (Mimeographed).

5/ Lakeview Cooperative Play Program, Report of Activities October 1960 to May 1961 (Mimeographed), p. 2.

were personally invited to take part in the group by their respective caseworkers, babysitting service was provided, and refreshments were served in pleasant surroundings. The first meeting was attended by 9 mothers, the second by 6, the third by 11, and the fourth by 2, after which the group was abandoned. 6/

Considerable difficulty was experienced in organizing a discussion group in one primarily Negro housing project in a small town in Connecticut. At the first scheduled meeting of the group, to be formed around the theme "life begins at 40," only two women came, and it was necessary to reschedule the event. Subsequently there were some meetings, including one on the topic "understanding the menopause" but there was an overall lack of response and it was necessary to abandon the project.

The Loring-Nicollet Center, a group-serving agency located in a depressed inner-city section of Minneapolis, sponsored a mothers' group in 1962 for AFDC clients. The aims of this group were broadly educational, recreational, and social. Much effort was expended to recruit members to participate. Nevertheless, a stable group membership never materialized. The Director and Unit Supervisor of the Loring-Nicollet Center report that "two signs of unsuccessful group organization are a continuing need to support members to attend the group and a high rate of membership turnover." 7/

Lack of success was encountered in a project initiated in New Haven County, Connecticut, where an effort was made to improve homemaking skills by giving instruction in dressmaking and the cutting and design of window drapes. It was expected that this would prove to be a very popular activity project among the women to be recruited to the program.

In the highly congested and urbanized Calumet region in the Great Lakes area, a major effort in family service was undertaken to upgrade and improve family life. A large number of community and social services were enlisted in this effort. It was reported, however,

---

6/ Eleanor Hanna and Janet Mallory, "ADC Mothers Meet to Reduce Problems," August 1963, unpublished manuscript.

7/ Courtenay W. Bell and Harvey L. Kaplan, "Public-Voluntary Sponsorship of a Mothers' Group." Social Casework, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 1964), p. 24.

that the educational and academic type programs drew very little response, whether they involved group discussions, individual approaches, classroom techniques, or how-to-do and demonstration type programs. Anything that smacked of learning or education was interpreted as a form of drudgery and something to be avoided. 8/

A family life specialist with the Detroit Public Schools reports as follows: "We experimented with the Parenthood in a Free Nation Program which originated in Chicago . . . but it was abandoned mainly because of lack of interest of parents. This program required a fee and purchase of books and pamphlets."

Vigorous and bold methods of reaching out, supplemented by individual contacts, are typically recommended by practitioners in the process of recruiting the group of participants. In one program, however, lack of success was attributed to the fact that too much pressure was brought to bear on potential participants in the course of making individual contacts. In contrast with the reportedly successful program in North Sampete, Utah (see p. 44) a similar program tried at Provo, Utah, that emphasized the many problems which would be handled failed when the individuals who had been contacted did not take part in the program.

Fathers Are Hard To Reach

Parent education has traditionally been a largely mother-oriented effort, although most parent educators subscribe to the ideal that fathers be involved in counseling and discussion programs.

We did not encounter a single program which recorded outstanding success in reaching the low-income father. Even when the leaders were men and the program was built around such male interests as carpentry, mechanics, or athletics, it was found that few, if any, fathers responded to invitations to joint parent education groups.

Fathers seem particularly disinclined to become involved in the discussion type group meetings. While some caseworkers have reported success in forming a counseling relationship with men, moving from a one-to-one to a group situation rarely meets with success.

8/ Evelyn Morrow, The Family Service Education Program (East Chicago, Ind.: Purdue-Calumet Development Foundation, 1958).

Difficulties in Obtaining Objective Assessments

The homemaking consultant program summarized on p. 12, included a special project in which 15 mothers were exposed to discussion-demonstrations for a 5-week-period. At the end of the project it was reported that enough improvement had been made in 10 of the homes so that "the families were allowed to continue to live in the project." 9/ The other five families were evicted.

Such reports are not very helpful because they do not enable us to come away with objective conclusions about the effectiveness of the program. We have no way of knowing what might have happened to these 15 families if the homemaking consultant had not been involved with them for 5 weeks. Would the outcome have been the same or different? We have no way of judging whether an entirely different service or intervention may have yielded a similar or even improved result. We do not know whether, following the termination of this project, some among the 10 improved families were later evicted, or whether among the 5 evicted families some may have improved in housekeeping standards to the extent of being readmitted.

Since almost without exception the efforts reviewed in this inquiry were intended to meet immediate needs of clients in very concrete community situations and not to test out in research demonstrations, the efficacy of parent education, it is understandable that the projects do not embody in their assessments the methods and procedures of field research. Thus, the evaluations of the reviewed projects, as provided by respondents and in the published literature, do not entail careful statistical analyses, maintenance of observational protocols compiled by research associates not connected with giving the service, use of control, comparison, or placebo groups, post-project interviews in which the participants themselves are asked to characterize and assess their participation in the program, systematic followups according to specified dimensions of presumed effect, and similar procedures.

We have encountered only two reports on projects which included a more systematic approach to research and evaluation: 10/

9/ M. Esther Hill, "Helping Low-Income Parents Through Homemaking Consultants," Children, Vol. 10, No. 4 (July-August 1963), pp. 132-136.

10/ In 1959 Brim (op. cit., pp. 268-317) reviewed a number of studies on parent education, very few of which involved low-income clientele. Brim's chief finding was that claims concerning the effectiveness of parent education were inconclusive.

An effort to improve housekeeping. As a cooperative undertaking of the Friends Neighborhood Guild and the Philadelphia Housing Authority, a demonstration project was conducted between 1961 and 1963 with the aim of assisting a group of poor housekeepers to avoid being evicted from a public housing facility. It was planned to offer the families a program of services including the following: a mothers' discussion group, a homemaking consultant, a preschool play group, a teenage girls' discussion group, a teenage boys' discussion group, and a fathers' discussion group. The 41 chronic poor housekeeping families were divided into experimental and control groups.

One summary statement on this demonstration project reports that "results of the final ratings showed that the experimental program was more effective than the control." 11/ Another summary statement reports that "comparison of the housekeeping scores of the experimental and control groups provided evidence favoring the experimental program, but not statistically significant evidence." 12/ A fuller report of the demonstration states that "the services did, in fact, help these families improve their housekeeping practices," but that the finding must be considered "suggestive, not conclusive." 13/ It is also stated that improvement occurred among those who were not treated, and that "among those who manage to improve on their own, the followup rating three months after the termination of the program reveals more sustained and continued improvement than among those who received service." 14/

With respect to the program offerings mentioned above, the fathers' group never materialized, since men were unwilling to attend. During the first year of the demonstration, 12 group sessions were scheduled for the mothers' group. Of the 19 mothers in the experimental group, 8 did not attend a single session, 1 attended one session, 3 attended two sessions,

---

11/ Mildred W. Guinessy and Harold Lewis, Letter, Children, Vol. 11, No. 2 (March-April 1964), p. 80.

12/ Harold Lewis, "Etiology of Poor Housekeeping Among Low Income Public Housing Families," Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 26, No. 2, (May 1964), p. 225.

13/ Harold Lewis and Mildred Guinessy, Helping the Poor Housekeeping Family in Public Housing, Friends Neighborhood Guild, Philadelphia, September 1963 (Mimeographed), p. 232.

14/ Ibid., p. 231.

2 attended 3 sessions, 1 attended 4 sessions, 2 attended 6 sessions, 1 attended 7 sessions, and 1 attended 9 sessions. Thus, among the experimental group the average attendance was less than four mothers. 15/ During the second year no effort was made to sustain a regular mothers' discussion group.

A relocation project in Washington, D.C. The District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency sponsored a demonstration project in family relocation from January 1958 through August 1960. The aim of the demonstration was to meet the educational and social welfare needs of families slated for relocation in the wake of a large-scale urban renewal effort in southwest Washington, D.C. A range of services was offered to assist families in constructive planning of the impending move, to maintain good housekeeping standards, and to develop constructive attitudes toward a variety of civic responsibilities. A treatment group of 198 families evidencing serious social need was compared with a group of 198 untreated families. The educational and social service offerings of this comprehensive demonstration included casework, evening classes, discussion groups, workshops, recreation activities, and certain health services. At the termination of the demonstration, an assessment relying on statistical and objective measurements revealed little significant difference between the two groups of families. 16/

The Southwest Washington Demonstration Project undertook to sponsor a discussion group for mothers from October 1958 to June 1959, when it was abandoned. Although it was reported that the mothers' group served to provide social activity for "women who had been active in the community," 17/ throughout most of its existence the attendance at meetings averaged less than five mothers, and only six participants were present for 10 or more meetings of the group. 18/ There was no evidence that the discussion group itself contributed to the slight indication of difference between the treated and untreated groups in this demonstration.

15/ Ibid., pp. 323-324

16/ Community Services and Family Relocation (The Report of a Demonstration Project Carried out under the Provisions of the Housing Act of 1954) Washington: The District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency, April 1964, p. 14.

17/ Ibid., p. 48.

18/ Ibid., p. 45.

Chapter III

PSYCHOLOGICAL OR THERAPEUTIC EFFECT OF THE PROGRAMS AS A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

The announced and explicit goals of many of the programs reviewed in this survey (See Appendix) are simple and concrete: to improve housekeeping, to inculcate more responsible habits in money management, to give instruction in preparing low-cost meals, to teach sewing, to improve techniques of child management, and the like. In other programs, however, there are additional or alternative goals of developing self-awareness and psychological insight about family relations, mitigating feelings of loneliness and inadequacy, providing opportunities for mothering, and improving or sustaining ego strength. We may refer to this latter cluster of goals as having to do with mental hygiene or supportive therapy. As has already been pointed out, no project reviewed for purposes of this inquiry is presented as a project in group psychotherapy.

It is important to note, however, that certain of the programs which have explicitly educational and non-therapeutic goals as their major focus are evaluated in terms of their therapeutic effect. Thus the success or the achievements of the program, unlike the avowed goals, are defined with respect to an implicit therapeutic outcome. Very often this outcome is presented as the subjective assessment of the leader or initiator of the project.

The "Group Educational Program for Marginally Adjusted Families" is one example of this tendency in assessing outcomes of programs. It was set up at the request of the Housing Authority for the clear purpose of teaching tenants ways of budgeting and helping them to become more responsible in meeting rent payments. The program is characterized as "semi-coercive": Forty-three married couples received a formal letter asking them to attend the sessions and making it clear "that failure to attend might have unpleasant consequences." 1/ In addition to receiving this letter, the tenants were visited by an official of the Housing Authority who "confirmed the Housing Authority's expectation that the tenant would attend." Nevertheless, the average attendance at the sessions varied from eight to ten participants.

1/ Muriel Nelson Rogers, "A Group Educational Program for Marginally Adjusted Families," Social Casework, Vol. 43, No. 4 (April 1962), pp. 178-184.

In the report of this educational program, no information is given as to whether the tenants actually did become more responsible in meeting their rent payments. The project was judged to be highly successful. The judgment of success is expressed in the following paragraph:

> In essence, the institute was an educational experience geared to an acknowledgement of the inner resources and potentials of public housing tenants whose marginal existence, constant crises, and resultant humiliations are so corrosive to the ego. The clients used the institute as a means of beginning to understand some of the factors underlying their own impulsive behavior and faulty judgment, and to begin to take more mature responsibility in the handling of many aspects of their daily life. The peer group setting provided a special support for those persons who are continually being made aware of their own inadequacies and failures. In the group they found mutual support and cooperation, an experience different from those they usually encountered, where they were left defensive, isolated, and even more threatened. Having gained a sense of self-respect, they now found the courage to assert a healthier aggression toward life. Intrafamilial relationships, family patterns, and common problems of family life could be discussed more constructively because husbands and wives attended the sessions together and the family unit was the focus of the group's attention. 2/

Thus, ego strength, self-respect, and "healthier aggression toward life" rather than improvement in meeting rent payments are assumed at this point to be the criteria of success for this effort.

The Philadelphia Homemaking Consultant program described on p. 47 served a majority of mothers who were characterized as "extremely poor managers and housekeepers." 3/ Their homes were dirty and poorly furnished, the children were inadequately fed and clothed, and one-third of the families were without a father. Also, many of the referred families were on the verge of being evicted by the Housing Authority.

2/ *Ibid*., p. 183.

3/ Hill, *loc.cit*.

Nevertheless, among the questions which the consulting home economist were required to use as a "yardstick for defining effectiveness" of the program were those having to do with "improved relationships among family members," whether all members of the family took a democratic part in the work of the home, whether family members sat down to meals according to a regular schedule, to what extent better use was made of leisure time, and whether family members "take the initiative in solving their own problems." It is possible to suggest that, although it may not be likely, a family could score highly with respect to many of these items while the home remains dirty, poorly furnished, and the children ill-clothed and ill-fed. In other words, the program might be deemed "successful" even if the chief aim of the project -- improved housekeeping -- is not achieved.

A similar tendency to define the success or the worth of a project according to inferred psychological, therapeutic, or social side-effects rather than actual changes or improvement in the concrete behavior which evoked the need for the project was particularly noticeable in such activity programs as sewing, meal preparation, and field trips. That is, many such activities were typically deemed successful not because they resulted in altered behavior in the low-income milieu, but because their sponsors viewed them as "morale boosters."

Also, it must be pointed out that a considerable disadvantage of this mode of assessment is that the judgment is almost invariably made by the caseworker or home economist in charge of the program.

No attempt is herein being made to judge whether or not the psychological or therapeutic side-effect is as important as the concrete behavioral goal of the project. Indeed, this effect may even be more powerful and lasting. But to the extent that a program is being assessed on these altered or incidental grounds -- incidental to the chief focus of the undertaking -- it becomes necessary to raise the following question: if the chief criterion of success is the psychological or therapeutic impact on the participant, would an alternate program frankly and directly designed to meet this need have an even greater impact? In other words, perhaps a quite different program with a different approach, implicitly and explicitly intended to promote personality or psychological change, might achieve even superior results than those sometimes reported for parent education projects.

Chapter IV

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR PARENT EDUCATION AMONG THE POOR

The preceding chapter reviews certain limitations of various reported parent education programs, as well as the difficulty of securing reliable and objective assessments of the programs. The available evidence does not appear to allow for any firm conclusions as to the usefulness of parent education among low-income families.

Experimental and objective reports on actual programs of our own day, however, do not constitute the sole basis on which the prospects for parent education may be judged. While demonstration programs and field research under controlled conditions will always contribute the major body of information for assessing educational efforts, this does not gainsay the usefulness of insights which may derive from the historical record and from informed theoretical speculation.

In this chapter the scope of the discussion on prospects for parent education among present-day low-income families is broadened by including certain theoretical and frankly speculative considerations which may perhaps serve to enrich the discussion. In every discussion of specific views and approaches, an effort has been made to marshal the arguments both for and against a certain practice or prospect. Since we are dealing with questions to which there may be only few clear-cut answers, all efforts promoting a further clarification of the very questions themselves can be said to serve a constructive purpose. Thus, we have not hesitated to present vigorous arguments both supporting and challenging a given viewpoint.

In any event, since there is little likelihood that appropriate and sufficient data from the field will soon be forthcoming to resolve many of the issues raised in previous chapters, we are surely justified in exploring all avenues which might yield some enlightenment.

Is Parent Education Essentially a Middle-Class Undertaking?

From the time of its formal origins at the turn of the last century, parent education has been a predominantly middle-class enterprise. 1/ The Child Study Association of America and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, two of the leading organizations in the field, have appealed for the most part to a middle-class audience. When the Lawrence Spellman Rockefeller Memorial and the Association of University Women were active in the parent education movement, their chief contribution was in the direction of promoting research undertakings and professionalization of the parent educator as practitioner.

It must be remembered that formal and organized parent education -- clubs, discussion groups, structured observation programs in schools, child study circles -- has never been a widespread phenomenon in American history. To this day the vast majority of American mothers and fathers, middle-class as well as non-middle-class, have had contact with parent education only through the mass media or an occasional PTA lecture. Only a small minority of all parents takes part in structured activities.

Depending on how we interpret the predominantly middle-class character of parent education, there are factors and forces which can be seen to limit the appeal of parent education among low-income groups, and to limit professional impacts even when the structured educational programs are well planned and well implemented. These factors have operated in the past, and may continue to be relevant in the present.

The American approach to education in general has always stressed egalitarianism. 2/ The idea that there should be different educational approaches for different classes, income levels, and even religions and sexes, has often been resisted in the history of American education and is not enthusiastically received by the less advantaged segments of the public. Even when the egalitarian approach is prominently abandoned --

---

1/ See Brim, loc. cit.

2/ The stress was there in theory even when there was violation in practice. See John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1916); Ellwood P. Cubberley, Public Education in the United States (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919); Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

as in the case of racially segregated schools or parochial systems of education -- there is still an attempt to salvage it by stressing such ideas as "separate but equal" or by requiring that all students undergo a common curriculum to offset the possible divisive tendencies flowing from differences in sectarian or sectional ideologies.

In those cases where there was an obvious need for quite distinctive educational methods and approaches, as in schools for deaf, blind, and otherwise handicapped individuals, the tendency in American education has been, when possible, to model them closely on the more "regular" approaches. In recent years we have seen efforts to assimilate even severely handicapped individuals (such as blind children) in regular classroom programs.

A strict adherent to and interpreter of this egalitarian tendency in American education might argue that the major skills, duties, responsibilities, and even techniques of parenthood should not be formulated with reference to differences in income level. The adherent of such an approach might claim that even though in reality educational implications and parental practices may vary endlessly from family to family, it is not necessary to affirm a separate need for something called "parent education for low-income families." Such an adherent might further argue that a mother or father might take umbrage at the idea that he is being deliberately helped or advised to rear his offspring in a way that is conformable with his predefined status as a "low-income citizen," that he can be put in a category distinct from others, and must practice his role in conformity with "parent education for low-income families." Also, the claim might be advanced that professionals who are called upon to design such programs may be ill-equipped or uncomfortable with the tasks of deliberately promoting forms of social education that can at least be interpreted as going counter to the democratic and egalitarian ideals of American life and social relationships.

In response to the viewpoint forwarded above by our assumed "egalitarian," a strong case could be made in support of the idea that special forms of parent education must be developed and maintained for low-income and minority groups within the population, and that this can be accomplished, moreover, without doing any violence to the democratic and egalitarian ideals of our society. On the contrary, it might be claimed that such well-formulated programs may serve rather to implement these ideals where they do not yet prevail and to strengthen them where they are defective.

Thus, it appears that the basic problem is the poverty situation itself, and that certain life styles have evolved among the poor as an adaptation to the situation. No doubt basic economic and social strategies are required to change the situation. But these alone may not be adequate, and low-income and deprived families may well be in need of basic help in changing child-rearing practices, in achieving ways of bringing up children so that they will have a better chance of entering into the mainstream of society. 3/ Even if new advantages and opportunities are made available -- in jobs, housing, schools -- they may prove inadequate and ineffective if the poor and deprived parent is without the needed "cultural enrichment" (in the broadest sense) to offset the cultural and other deprivations which inhibit him from truly using the newer opportunities.

For these reasons, the adherent of "parent education for low-income families" would maintain that the basic content of the programs must be the same, but that special techniques, approaches, and educational materials (films, books, pamphlets) must be developed to put across this basic content.

It is possible to take issue with some of the specific content of parent education intended for low-income subjects. While well-intentioned and constructive in aim, one could argue that on occasion it is unrealistically formulated and presented.

Inculcating Thrift and Habits of Wise Spending

In his study of marketing and consumer practices among low-income urban dwellers, Caplovitz points out that ways of shopping and buying are powerfully determined by credit arrangements and financial policies of retail establishments, and that poor families appear to have a great need for "compensatory consumption." 4/

It may be claimed that such practices are not amenable to educational intervention alone, since in large measure they are dictated by

---

3/ See Chilman, Catherine S., "Child-Rearing and Family Relationship Patterns of the Very Poor," Welfare in Review, January 1965.

4/ Caplovitz, David, The Poor Pay More - Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) pp. 14 ff., pp. 48 ff.

commercial interests which are beyond the control of the low-income consumer, and since they entail psychological processes which parent education does not typically attempt to influence.

It might further be questioned whether didactic forms of instruction and counseling on wise spending, family budgeting, and the importance of thrift and delaying gratification can be very helpful to low-income adults. This suspicion may be reinforced when we consider that the prevailing standards of middle-class consumer behavior are rooted in vigorous spending and constantly accelerating rates of consumer credit. By 1956, according to one report, there was almost one trillion dollars worth of "financing" in the United States economy. 5/

By 1965, total consumer indebtedness was approaching 1.3 trillion dollars and still on the increase. 6/ Thus, ordinary indebtedness has risen considerably in the recent past and now characterizes almost all strata within the middle class and to a certain extent within low-income groups as well. This may well mean that by asking low-income adults to be especially frugal and thrifty in their consumer behavior and credit arrangements, we are in a sense asking them to be "more middle-class" than the middle-class consumers themselves.

Also, since there is ample evidence that middle-income people are no better informed than others on the intricacies of credit buying, 7/ it is perhaps unrealistic to expect the low-income adults to be even more prudent and skillful than others in interpreting the details of credit arrangements and contracts. In the light of such considerations, it would be possible for a critic to suggest that when parent educators seek to inculcate principles of wise financial management among low-income subjects they may be aiming at a goal which has few prospects of being met, and which may well be unrealistic even for large numbers of financially less burdened middle-income adults. 8/

5/ Gilbert Burch and Sanford Parker, "The Coming Turn in Consumer Credit," Fortune, Vol. 53, No. 3 (March 1956), p. 99.

6/ United States Department of Commerce, "Public and Private Debt and Corporate Finance," Office of Business Economics (OBE 65-30, May 24, 1965).

7/ George Katona, The Powerful Consumer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

8/ Dorothy K. Newman, "Economic Status of the Negro," Report, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965 (Mimeographed); Alvin L. Schorr, Slums and Social Insecurity, Social Security Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1963.

Also, it must be borne in mind that low-income Negroes frequently pay higher rents than do non-Negroes for the same housing, and that the low-income population is often compelled to pay higher credit rates than others. Thus in the open market place the poor often pay a special premium merely for being poor. This premium cannot be abrogated solely by educational efforts directed at the low-income group, and individual members of the group, perhaps aware of this fact, may take a dim view of the parent educator who remains unaware or chooses to ignore this state of affairs. It may seem to the knowledgeable low-income adult that the educator who appeals to the poor to be more thrifty and to take better care of the landlord's property is in a sense allied with those forces which exact from the poor the premium put on poverty.

In response to certain of the points raised above, it can be cogently argued that even persons with high incomes have certain limits on their spending patterns, and that all other considerations aside, it is a fact that people with limited incomes must face the reality of a more stringent control on expenditures or else suffer the consequences. The undeniable fact that this is a difficult challenge to the parent educator does not mean that it is an impossible one.

Also, there is no basic contradiction in the conduct of a parent educator who seeks to inculcate practices of thrift and wise spending while at the same time being realistically aware of basic economic and commercial mechanisms that make it very difficult for the low-income consumer to spend wisely. The effective parent educator might have to be consciously and openly enrolled in the group of community agents dedicated to sponsoring remedial services and legal procedures in combatting exploitative commercial practices. By making it very clear to his low-income clients that he is aware of certain facts about the perils of consumership, and that he is an active participant in the struggle for sounder commercial and consumer practices, the parent educator might succeed in establishing himself as a dependable and trustworthy resource person, an individual enlisted on the side of the low-income or minority group.

In any event, it can be argued that merely to abandon the low-income consumer to his fate, and to abdicate any efforts at vigorous remedial education would merely serve to make a bad situation worse.

Activity Projects

Demonstration and how-to-do type projects may be lacking in appeal to low-income families because of value conflicts that underlie the presentation of the content.

In American society today powerful pressures are daily brought to bear on all citizens, irrespective of social or class origin, urging them to obtain and use the "good things of life." TV commercials, radio announcers, magazine articles, and lavish advertising displays make it amply clear that the desirable way of American life requires new cars, attractive clothing, spacious homes, a swimming pool, a deep-freeze, large stocks of meats and fresh fruits and rich desserts, elaborate kitchen equipment, air-conditioning, and many other luxury items and labor-saving equipment. Even the least sophisticated adult from low-income segments of the population is aware that these commodities are available and that many of them can be found in the homes of more affluent families, including the families of some social workers and parent educators who sponsor programs in homemaking, sewing, cooking, etc., intended for low-income participants. It is possible that many low-income homemakers are not able to conceive of improved or strengthened family life except in terms of the acquisition of middle-class material possessions. Since no amount of participation in even the most artful and skillfully conducted workshops or mothers' groups devoted to preparing low-cost meals, re-upholstering furniture, or sewing inexpensive clothing can make it possible for the participants realistically to aspire to a middle-income way of life, perhaps the majority of low-income individuals will always reject these projects as irrelevant to their proper concerns. Those who are upwardly aspiring may seek other ways to express their ambitions, while those who are not aspiring to the middle-class way of life may simply ignore the courses and workshops. On the other hand, there is considerable reported evidence that participation in sewing and other do-it-yourself groups has great appeal to some low-income persons, as well as to other people. While this may represent a minority of the population, a number of women are reported to gain psychological satisfaction and new social skills along with much more attractive clothing and home furnishings through their membership in such educational groups. No doubt, more experimentation and objective evaluation is needed concerning the relative costs and effectiveness of programs of this sort.

Another conflict possibly obtaining in some of the how-to-do workshops may stem from an unintended requirement that the participant accept an inferior self-image as a prerequisite to his effective mastery of the content of the workshop. To cite an example: In a course on the preparation of low-cost meals it is common to give instruction on preparing nutritious dishes using such items as dried milk, powdered eggs, and the cheaper varieties of meat or fish including brains, kidneys, and tripe. [9] Participants are sometimes reminded that a number of these commodities are available in free distribution as part of welfare or surplus food programs. The average low-income homemaker, even if she is unsophisticated, uneducated, and a welfare client, is probably aware that in the large majority of American homes it is uncommon for meals featuring such items as beans and powdered eggs to be met with an enthusiastic reception on the part of the family. The participant in the low-income workshop will suspect, rightly or wrongly, that the home economist or cooking instructor who is urging her clients to master and use these menus may not herself ordinarily prepare such meals in her own home. Thus, it may seem to the low-income mother that she is being asked to accept and adjust to an inferior status as a homemaker, in that she is being urged to manage her home in conformity with a standard that would be unattractive and undesirable to a large number of Americans. Whether the meal is or is not nutritious and attractive may well be beside the point. Perhaps to many low-income mothers it is a matter of some pride to be able, even with sacrifice, to serve good cuts of meat and more elaborately prepared foods, relying on surplus items only when there is no alternative. Such mothers may be strongly disinclined to attend demonstrations and workshops which remind them of their inferior status as low-income homemakers.

However, these comments may well apply only to a portion of the poor. Reportedly, many home economics instructors build their cooking and demonstration programs on the expressed food preferences of their group and try to find uses for surplus foods that are strongly associated with these preferences. Also, reports indicate that at least in certain parts of the country some among the surplus foods are highly popular, are thought to be of excellent quality, and may make the difference between serious malnutrition and adequate survival. Perhaps for those housewives who are "home-centered" and "domestic" in their interest patterns, an invitation to attend a special baking demonstration on the use of surplus flour would be a very appropriate and appealing invitation.

---

[9] See, for example, the Consumer Marketing Information sheets prepared by the Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, 1959-1961, including "Stretch Your Meat Dollars," "Variety Meats," and "About Chitterlings, Hogmaw, Tripe."

A similar value contradiction, at least for some low-income adults, may inhere in those activity programs which seek to transmit skills of sewing and home canning. There are indications that in American life today home canning, home baking, and sewing occupy an increasingly small part of a housewife's time and tend to be undertaken as an avocation or hobby by the more affluent or by the working mother. American mothers rely to a considerable extent on commercially baked and canned foods and ready-made clothing, and a number would probably deem it inefficient to depend in any significant way, as their grandmothers may have, on their own skills in canning, baking, and dressmaking. Moreover, such pursuits often require special time, space, and equipment which may not be available in many low-income households.

At the same time, it must be pointed out that regardless of social class individual parents have their special skills, aptitudes and interests. Mothers, in particular, experience different demands on their time, energy, and commitments at different stages in the family life cycle. When children are young, the mother may be more deeply involved in "creative homemaking"; as her youngsters move out into the larger community, it may be more appropriate for her to become involved in civic affairs or to train for and seek employment.

Low-income parent education along with other counseling and educational endeavors may need to take into account, more often than it does, the wide range of individual differences and changing parent roles, changes which follow in the wake of shifts in the age structure of the family and the evolution of home life as children grow up and center their activities more and more in the community at large.

The Reluctance of Low-Income Adults to Seek Self-Improvement and Join Parent Education Groups

Perhaps a major explanation for the limited appeal of parent education among low-income adults may have to do with the widely held view that low-income adults are generally unresponsive to all forms of education and self-improvement.

According to Carl L. Marburger, formerly director of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement in the Detroit public schools, "Parents in depressed urban areas typically stay away from schools. They stay away from school because their own experiences have been either unpleasant or short-lived or both. They are fearful of the institution of the school and lack information about what is taking place in the school. They do not typically join organizations and therefore do not normally attend parent group meetings, do not participate in adult education classes -- they generally avoid all school contacts." 10/

It is well known that low-income adults are much more reluctant to join groups and seek formal membership in civic organizations than are individuals from middle and upper-income levels. Very frequently low income is associated with low vocational status, inferior education, minority group status, and depressed aspiration level; studies indicate that this cluster of attributes does not correlate with a readiness to affiliate with formal community groups. 11/

10/ Carl L. Marburger, "Basic Considerations for Educational Planning for Children in Depressed Urban Areas," Report, July 12, 1962 (Mimeographed), p. 18.

11/ Cf. Noel P. Gist and L.A. Halbert, Urban Society (4th ed.) New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1956, pp. 273-404; Wendell Bell and Maryanne T. Force, "Social Structure and Participation in Different Types of Formal Associations," Social Forces, Vol. 24, No. 4 (May 1956), pp. 345-350; Charles R. Wright and Herbert H. Hyman, "Voluntary sociation Memberships of American Adults: Evidence from National Sample Surveys," American Sociological Review, Vol. 23, No. 3 (June 1958), pp. 284-294; and Leonard Reissman, "Class, Leisure, and Social Participation," American Sociological Review, Vol. 19, No. 1 (February 1954), pp. 76-84.

Even vigorous, inventive, and long-term efforts to organize block clubs or civic associations in low-income neighborhoods usually succeed in attracting only a small number of dependable adherents. 12/

We can surmise that the minority of low-income adults who do not adhere to this pattern of civic apathy possess certain psychological and social characteristics which distinguish them from the majority of low-income groups, and that these characteristics enable them to accept a mode of action which is more typical of middle-income segments of the population. In other words, we can perhaps say of at least some of these individuals, even without knowing the precise nature of the aforementioned characteristics, that they are upwardly mobile or at least "upwardly aspiring." Civic associations, educational courses, workshops, and the prevailing social groupings are almost invariably directed towards some social or self-improvement aim. Such associations and educational efforts will perhaps prove attractive to the upwardly aspiring individual, the individual who is interested in personal uplift and improvement.

It would then be logical to conclude that parent education efforts, inasmuch as they entail willingness to affiliate and participate in a group, would for the most part tend to attract those low-income individuals who had already received a certain push along the upwardly mobile path.

Having said this, however, it then becomes relevant to inquire whether an upwardly aspiring low-income mother or father would seek to express these aspirations by affiliating with parent education programs. (We must keep in mind that the overwhelming majority of such programs are non-coercive and non-authoritative in character.) To what extent will the offerings of family life and parent education programs, as described in this report, prove attractive and promising to the low-income parent who is seeking to reach middle-income status? Assuming that parent education programs are competing with a large assortment of adult education and self-improvement programs currently available to low-income adults, to what extent will the upwardly aspiring individual choose to invest his time and energies in a parent education program in preference, say, to a course on "Improving Your English" or on

---

12/ George Brager, "Organizing the Unaffiliated in a Low-Income Area," Social Work, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April 1963), pp. 34-40.

Business Arithmetic, as well as literally dozens of similar improvement and vocational type courses? To pose a more concrete case: An upwardly aspiring young mother, living in a depressed neighborhood, is concerned about the future welfare of her children. She has only a limited number of daytime or evening hours which can be devoted to outside pursuits. How will she spend this time? She may decide that the best thing she can do for her children is to improve her practical and psychological skills as a mother, and thus she may enroll in the parent education program. Alternatively, she may conclude that her most important contribution would be to upgrade the physical and social environment of her children, and in this case she might decide to invest her energies in a block club, neighborhood social service, a local PTA etc. She may arrive at a quite different assessment of her situation, determining to move out of the neighborhood at all costs and bending all of her efforts towards the goal of increasing her family income. In this case she would use her time in salaried work or towards improving her earning capacities so that she may be able to earn more in the future. Still another possibility for this hypothetical mother would be a decision to use her spare time in purely cultural and recreational activities, on the conviction that her soundest contribution to the welfare of her children would be the enrichment and mellowing of her own personality as a mother and a human being.

Since the kinds of activities mentioned above are by no means mutually contradictory, it is possible that some low-income mothers will choose to participate in many or even all of them. In actuality, however, it is probably only the rare mother who could successfully undertake such a strenuous deployment of her energies, and it is probably far more likely that upwardly aspiring low-income adults express their drives in a limited number of endeavors. To the extent that this is true then a decision to invest one's efforts in parent education would be made only after a number of other alternate courses had been ruled out, as discussed above.

With respect to those who are definitely "hard to reach" and not motivated to move away from low-income styles of living -- those who must be "inspired to aspire," so to speak -- what appeals are most likely to win a response among them? Will they be willing to attend demonstrations and discussions on the topic Whether or Not to Spank, or Proper Methods of Sex Instruction for Pre-School Children? Will they attend sessions on the preparation of low-cost meals? Or will they tend to respond to entirely different kinds of appeals, such as those of civil rights movements or religious protest sects? Which activity will be seen as carrying most relevance to the idea that the low-income style of life is not foreordained and that the individual has it within his power to alter this style of life? In other words, which activity is most likely to inspire "upward aspirations," to cause low-income adults to overcome the preliminary hurdle along the road towards upward mobility?

One final factor may be mentioned in possible explanation of the limited appeal of educational or self-improvement programs among the more seriouly deprived low-income families. This has to do with the possible negative and symbolic effects of the mere existence of a middle-class viewpoint on poverty and the lower class style of life.

While it does appear to be true that many middle-income people do not much mind reading fairly negative descriptions of their life and values, including references to over-conformity, insularity, status-seeking, indifference to the nonsuburban world, and so on, it does not necessarily follow that the most deprived among the low-income people are equally indifferent to descriptions and evaluations of their ways of living. It is possible that low-income people who live in depressed neighborhoods do not welcome being characterized as apathetic and low in motivation, dwelling in rat-and insect-infested rooms, unable to control their children, indifferent to their health needs, and residing in homes which should be condemned.

Even though such statements or analyses may not be made by social workers and educators within hearing of the low-income families with whom they work, it is possible that their clients assume, rightly or wrongly, that the social workers and educators are looking down upon or patronizing them as victims of an inferior culture, and that the real purpose is not simply to help them, but to manipulate them or cause them to change, for ends which may not have to do with their genuine welfare. Even when basically incorrect, it can be assumed that such impressions might serve to make for low motivation among prospective low-income clients. It may be much harder to remove or counter-influence such impressions than the educator generally believes.

In connection with this point, it may be worthwhile to remark that throughout our history as a nation the attitude toward charitable works reveals ambivalent tendencies. Charitable impulses and aiding the poor have generally been praised by religious and moral leaders. At the same time there has been a widespread tendency to regard the professional philanthropist as a busybody and self-seeker who may be more interested in tax rebates and his newspaper image than in the needs of human beings. 13/ Moreover, the number of Americans who are grateful to be recipients of charity is few. In this regard, the classic remark made by Charles Dickens concerning the poor of England, to the effect that they tend to be ungrateful for small favors and disinclined to praise their benefactors, may well be true of low-income people in present-day America.

If the above considerations have validity either singly or in combination, this would provide at least a partial explanation for the low motivation among low-income groups to participate even in well-planned, well-organized, and highly publicized programs of parent education. It would also tend to reinforce the theoretical analysis and program recommendations of those economists and policy planners who for more than one generation have taken a less sanguine view of educational efforts to reach the poor and place their major trust on more far-reaching socioeconomic innovations, such as newer versions of TVA-type programs, more comprehensive systems of income maintenance, extensions of social security measures, and further revisions in tax and fiscal policies so as to achieve more equitable distribution of the national income. 14/

New trends with respect to poverty and education include entirely new factors. The intense world-wide concern to promote education and technological progress among underdeveloped nations, the movements to secure civil rights and to combat the evils of racism, the recently launched domestic war on poverty -- all this may mean that a new soil is being prepared for the growth of grass-roots efforts to alter life styles among poor and culturally different segments of the population. If this is so, it is possible that parent education among low-income parents in

---

13/ Robert H. Bremner, American Philanthropy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

14/ This viewpoint received some of its most characteristic expressions in the New Deal era. See, for example, Paul H. Douglas, "The New Deal and the Family," Journal of the American Association of University Women, Vol. 28, No. 1, (October, 1934), pp. 9-14. Douglas stresses the significance for the family of the appropriations for relief, the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Camps, the abolition of child labor, the farm mortgage laws, better housing, and the proposed social insurance plans of that time. He does not appear to put much emphasis on educational efforts divorced from concrete measures of social reform. For a more current expression of this viewpoint, see the publications of the Conference on Economic Progress, and also Leon H. Keyserling, "Poverty and the Economy," The Nation, Vol. 200, No. 23 (June 7, 1965), pp. 615-617.

the United States has new prospects which cannot be predicted on the basis of past experience.

It may be that methods and approaches which were only moderately successful, or even unsuccessful, in former generations will prove quite relevant to political and social conditions in the second half of the twentieth century. Or it may be that certain of these practices, suitably modified and then implemented in alliance with renewed social institutions, will take on a significance that was not formerly present. It is also possible to suggest that certain programs in the field of parent education are capable of succeeding only when applied on a sufficiently massive scale, demanding considerable resources of money and personnel. If this is the case, and if expanded resources will indeed become available in future years, this may also determine the outcome of efforts in the field.

A wide variety of approaches to the problems of poverty appears to be indicated. These approaches will no doubt require an experimental mood, objective and sophisticated evaluation, and adequate financing. Since we assume that human behavior has many causes and that our modern society is many-faceted and complex, it follows logically that a variety of remedies is called for in attempting to treat the many individual and social ills associated with poverty and insufficient income.

Chapter V

SUMMARY

The Child Life Studies Branch of the Children's Bureau conducted an informal survey of the status of parent education with low-income families in the United States for the period 1961-1963. This was supplemented by a selective review of current and historical literature in the field, and an examination of future prospects for parent education among the poor.

A number of agencies and individual practitioners report successful programs for reaching low-income families. Other sources give evidence of lack of success. For the most part these reports are based on informal and impressionistic accounts of home economists, nurses, social workers, and other parent educators. The reportedly successful programs include discussion groups, as well as recreational, social, and workshop type activities. The general view is that activity programs are more successful than groups focusing solely on discussion.

The chief aims of the parent education programs are to improve housekeeping, to strengthen inter-family relationships, to reinforce family-school understanding, and to improve personal skills, While programs exist in a variety of settings, major host or sponsoring agencies include the following: community centers and settlement houses, public schools and university extention programs, public housing projects, welfare and public health departments, private family agencies, and churches.

Practitioners recommend a bold and assertive style of leadership in organizing activity and discussion groups, and stress the importance of maintaining an atmosphere of frankness, mutual respect, and trust. Enthusiasm, willingness to experiment, patience, and a sense of humor are often mentioned as necessary attributes of the parent educator. Familiarity with the cultural characteristics and day-to-day life of low-income families is also said to be essential, although most agency leaders agree that such understanding can be within the grasp of a practitioner regardless of his own social class roots.

A number of agency leaders and social workers report considerable difficulties in organizing and sustaining parent education efforts with low-income clients. Attendance is often sporadic, and many programs do not last much longer than three or four meetings. Authoritative or even compulsory programs exhibit difficulty in sustaining themselves, and frequently the only readily identifiable criterion of success was simply attendance at scheduled meetings. In particular, it was very difficult to interest fathers in the programs, and the informal survey did not uncover a single undertaking in which prominent success was achieved in recruiting males to either discussion or activity type undertakings.

Because of the absence of objective methods of assessment and evaluation, there is no possibility of reporting in a reliable or systematic way on the overall effectiveness of the parent education efforts treated in this report. One aspect of the assessment frequently encountered was the tendency to gauge success not according to the announced practical goals of the effort, such as improved housekeeping, but according to certain inferred therapeutic side-effects of participation in the program.

While this informal survey has uncovered no recent demonstration projects using experimental and comparison groups, intended directly to measure the effectiveness of parent education with low-income families, there have been a few such demonstration projects which deal indirectly with the effectiveness of parent education. These demonstrations offer slight or no evidence that the parent education component is effective in altering the attiuudes or behavior of low-income families.

In the absence of needed field evidence based on research involving treatment as well as non-treatment groups, and in view of the divided nature of reports on success and lack of success, no clear-cut recommendation can be forwarded at this time concerning the usefulness of parent education in working with low-income families. Since it is generally conceded that organized efforts to reach low-income families require patience, skill, and perseverance in the face of frequent absence of response, it is probably unwise even for highly experienced parent educators to undertake such efforts except on the basis of very careful planning and clearly adequate resources.

Although individual practitioners recommend increased use of parent education among low-income families, on the basis of a broader review of current reports, taking into account failures as well as successes, and on further examination of the historical evidence, it is yet open to question whether parent education can serve as a basic means of combatting the consequences of low-income family life. It is also a moot question whether parent education can serve with prominent success as a separate activity project in attacks on root causes of poverty in American society.

APPENDIX

A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF SOME ON-GOING PROGRAMS

Sketches of 19 parent education undertakings that seem to evidence positive effects are described.

On those programs for which no published report is cited, the information is derived from letters, unpublished reports, and interview notes on file with the Child Life Studies Branch of the Children's Bureau.

A "Swap-Shop" in Syracuse

In Syracuse a family service center has been operating a second-hand clothing exchange in a nearby housing project for over 10 years. Managed by the mothers, with help from the parent educator affiliated with the family agency, this "swap-shop" enables mothers to accumulate "credit-points" for bringing in clothing outgrown by members of their families, and then to apply these "credits" toward the purchase of clothing brought in by others. As the mothers carry on their trading (while the children are cared for in the adjoining nursery), a parent educator, trained in both home economics and social work is present; she often suggests that they might like to bring their new acquisitions to the center's sewing class so that the clothes could be fixed up to be a perfect fit.

Improving Home Management

A short-term demonstration project to improve housekeeping in the Tony Sudekum Housing Project of Nashville, Tennessee, was carried out in 1963. A group of eight women, ranging in age from 25 to 51, was selected on the basis of chronic failure to maintain acceptable housekeeping standards in the project.

A home visit was made to each of the women by the project manager and the social service worker attached to the project. After explaining the program to the women they were informed that "they must attend the six group sessions of the group and that their housekeeping must meet minimum standards, or it would be necessary for the Housing Authority to take serious action." [1] The possibility of eviction was not specifically discussed, and no attempt was made to clarify the nature of the action contemplated. A scheduled inspection visit was to be made at the conclusion of the series of six meetings. In the interim there would be no visits on the part of the housing social service worker.

Because many of the families in the project were without needed household items such as linens and china, it was decided to offer one or two "incentive gifts" to each participant during each of the sessions. The women greatly appreciated receiving these gifts, which had been contributed by agency board members and church groups.

---

[1] Myra T. Johnson and Georgiana McLarnan, "Demonstrating an Approach to Improving Substandard Housekeeping" (mimeographed, n.d.), p.7.

Housekeeping assignments were made at the weekly meetings, and beginning with the fourth session, a housekeeping rating card was used, with the women rating themselves. Refreshments were served at every meeting. While there was some stiffness in the early meetings, a group spirit quickly evolved, and the discussion for the most part remained focused on housekeeping practice in a constructive spirit.

The reported results of this demonstration far exceeded the expectations of the sponsors. In the judgment of the leader, almost all of the women in the program attained top level housekeeping standards at the end of the six sessions. They agreed to attend two additional group meetings on a purely voluntary basis at the conclusion of the prescribed program. This demonstration did not include a followup component. Irrespective of long-term gains, however, it was felt that the achieved results, as well as the positive interest in good housekeeping which was aroused among other project families indicate that much can be done through group meetings under warm but authoritative guidance to alter family life patterns among low-income residents of a housing project.

A Special Course within a Housing Authority

A training program was started in 1961 by the Chicago Housing Authority to give homemakers practical guidance in cooking, meal planning, budgeting, and work planning. The course lasted 8 weeks and was planned cooperatively by the Board of Education and the local Housing Authority. One aim of this course was to encourage the graduates to use their skills to aid other housing tenants with home management problems, especially those connected with illness in the family. The Program was an aspect of the Housing Authority's "Good Neighbor Program." 2/

Home Furnishing Tours in Wisconsin

An effort was made to reach low-income adolescent girls in 4-H clubs in rural Wisconsin as part of a project in consumer education. "Home furnishing tours" were organized under the auspices of the Wisconsin Extension Service, and furniture stores and china shops were visited in six separate trips. As of 1963 it was planned to continue and extend these tours to other regions of the State.

2/ Marie C. McGuire, "Our Cities Need You," Journal of Home Economics, Vol. 55, No. 2 (February 1963), pp. 99-103.

Home Management Aides

Concerned about the increasing public assistance caseload in Milwaukee County, the county welfare department sought to organize a program in home management and consumer education. The Wisconsin Home Economics Extension staff was asked to develop the program to train as home management aides women who were themselves receiving public assistance. Seventy-eight trainees were recruited by the county welfare department and reimbursed at an hourly rate. Their monthly assistance allotment was then withdrawn. Thirty-eight of the women were certified as qualified aides, having received training in the following subjects: meal planning, shopping, budgeting, credit buying, cooking, child welfare, clothing selection, and family values and goals. Eleven of the qualified aides were reported to have secured private employment, so that they were able to leave the assistance caseload. (It was not clear from the report whether any of the remaining aides were employed by the welfare department itself.)

A Homemaking Consultant Service in Philadelphia

For more than 15 years the School District of Philadelphia has been operating a homemaking consultant service as a joint undertaking of the divisions of school extension and home economics education. Nine home economists work with individuals and small groups referred by the schools. The leader focuses on discussions and demonstrations. Mothers are instructed in the preparation of well-balanced meals, lower-calorie diets, the mending and alteration of clothing, budgeting, health problems, and the importance of cleanliness. The physical and health needs of children are stressed in particular. An individual, accepting approach is used with each participant, and services are given largely in terms of the self-perceived needs of each mother. Families are frequently referred to public health nurses, the Department of Public Welfare, the Salvation Army, and the Housing Authority. The staff maintains active, continuous liaison with these agencies. Each consultant serves an average of 42 families, some of them for periods of 2 or 3 months, and others for as long as 12 months. 3/ In the judgment of the director, this program has been effective for the majority of the families served.

3/ Hill, loc, cit. p. 27.

Home Management Workshops for American Indians

Extension agents at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, organized and carried through a series of comprehensive workshops on family relations and home management during the summer of 1962. 4/ These were planned for a group of American Indian families with annual incomes of between $2,500 and $3,000 at a time when these families were preparing to move from substandard frame and log houses to a new low-rent housing project. The householders were completely unfamiliar with modern ways of home management and the use of electrical appliances. During the workshops practical instruction and demonstrations were given on cooking, cleaning, furniture repair and upholstering, as well as elementary aspects of money management and housekeeping. Special mimeographed materials were distributed.

Highly gratifying results were reported. Assistance rendered to a seven-member family is summarized as follows:

> Athelia Yellow Boy...had been living with her parents in a two-room log cabin which housed 16 persons altogether. A fire took the life of her husband and also destroyed all their possessions. Mrs. Yellow Boy was doubly afraid of changing living standards because of her added responsibility to her children and changing homes would mean lessening the help she had been receiving from relatives...She now takes it all in stride. She talks confidently of the future as she makes rugs and curtains for her new home. Her children are nearer the school and attend regularly. Mrs. Yellow Boy's income is $252.00 a month. Out of this she pays $53 rent, $5 to a department store account. She plans meals well in advance, and watches for grocery bargains, and budgets the remaining money. 5/

An Institute in Money Problems

A Family Life Institute on the topic "Money Problems in Your Family" was conducted for eight sessions by the Jewish Family Service of New York City in an effort to improve the behavior of tenants of a housing project. 6/ Forty-three families, chronically tardy in meeting

---

4/ Ronald Ross, "South Dakota Indian Families Move Up to New Housing," Extension Service Review, Vol. 24, No. 6 (July 1963), pp. 125-127.

5/ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

6/ Rogers, op. cit.

rent payments, were invited to attend the Institute, which was described as employing "semi-coercive methods of involving participants." An average of 8 to 10 persons attended the sessions.

Those conducting the institute found: "There is evidence that significant change in behavior did take place and that the participants did develop more mature and more responsible attitudes towards meeting their obligations not only as tenants but also as husbands, wives, and parents in their family relationships." 7/

Helping Tenant Groups

The Jewish Family Service of New York City sponsored a family life education program for 10 weeks in the Breukelen Housing Project of the New York City Housing Authority. The goals of the project were to reach an identified group of potentially evictable tenants and help both parents and children function as more responsible citizens and tenants, to improve the level of neighborly interaction among the groups, and to give instruction in ways of maintaining cleaner and neater homes. Poor housekeeping was interpreted to be an evidence and reflection of poor mental hygiene.

This family life program was jointly conducted by a home economist and a caseworker, and the meetings were attended by members of 14 selected families. Twelve of the families were reported to have improved to the extent that they appeared to be no longer evictable on grounds of unacceptable standards of housekeeping.

A Discussion Group in Connecticut

A successful discussion group organized in 1962 in a public housing project in Hartford County, Connecticut, was under the guidance of a home agent, a tenant advisor, and a visiting nurse. A considerable amount of planning and many auxiliary services were provided in order to initiate and sustain the project. A babysitting service was organized, toys and games were provided, and several home visits were made. It was only after six or seven meetings that the homemakers felt secure with the home agent and indicated a readiness to accept the help of resource people. These included an extension specialist in family life, a pediatrician, a hairdresser, a YMCA worker, a Salvation Army worker, and garden club leaders. In the beginning, participants came to the

---

7/ Ibid., p. 184

meetings only if they "felt like it," but after a number of months the leader of the program was able to report as follows:

> Almost Utopia--23 arrived for the meeting on Stretching the Dollar!! All of them worked out on paper a budget for their family. Thus after 13 months of struggling to get them to attend meetings (this time there was no coaxing from the tenant relations office, but there were visits from other homemakers in the project encouraging them to come).

"Food Buymanship"

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, a consumer education series was planned around problems of food "buymanship." This was a series of four sessions, each one 2 hours in duration, conducted at the University Extension Service, and dealing with such topics as the following: food selection, price variations, food cost, record keeping, brand names and labeling, trading stamps, and "gimmickry" in shopping. Although only 30 enrolled, the sessions were attended by as many as 117 women, ranging from 18 to 65 years of age.

Work with Young Couples

A young married couples' club catering to residents of a public housing project was sponsored in 1960-61 by Wesley House Centers in Nashville, Tennessee. 8/ The couples were between 15 and 23 years of age. The chief objectives of the service were to activate the young people socially, to promote emotional growth, to stimulate awareness of the marital relationship, and to inculcate personal and civic responsibility.

Using casework and group work techniques, the two leaders of the club organized activities including games, social dancing, bowling, cooking and serving a supper, and arts and crafts projects. As the informal activities unfolded, the young and often inarticulate members of the group were encouraged to express their ideas and feelings on various practical topics connected with marriage and homemaking. The professional leaders of the club report that as the activities became important to members of the group, the meetings became richer and more meaningful, and the level of discussion and interaction among individuals revealed a growth in responsibility and maturity on the part of certain couples.

8/ McLarnan and Neiswender, op. cit., p. 21.

An Experimental Program for Adolescent Husbands and Wives in Utah

A special course for five married couples, all under 21, was conducted during the winter and spring of 1961-62 in North Sampete, Utah, under the auspices of the Adult Education Department. The purpose of the course was to demonstrate a way of reaching young married people who had dropped out of high school and to help them solve homemaking and marital problems.

The special project was conducted by a former home economics teacher, who was a mother of seven children, and a lifetime resident of the county. This teacher began by contacting each couple in their own homes, explaining to them the purpose of the project. All but one of the couples had at least one child, and three of the husbands were unemployed.

Nine meetings were held in all, and the attendance was nearly perfect at each session. The sessions lasted from 6:30 to 10:00 p.m., and in almost every case consisted of the group preparation, serving, and subsequent evaluation of a meal according to a score sheet. This was followed by a discussion period. At the last meeting the meal was cooked by the husbands.

The husbands in some cases were reported as being more enthusiastic than the wives.

Association for Family Living, Chicago

The Association for Family Living in Chicago has reported successes in reaching low-income families, in particular the families of in-migrants to Chicago. The following statement summarizes the Association's approach and achievements:

> "The Association for Family Living is gaining 'popularity' and 'position' in all three housing projects where we are now working. Enrollment in all classes is slowly but steadily growing. Groups vary from 7 to 13 with an average attendance of 10. Most of the women are becoming so vitally interested and involved in our activities that they are making time to participate -- planning their meals so as to permit an extra hour for sewing in the afternoon - or coming in for an hour to get help with a problem. They discuss family problems in this easy, intimate atmosphere -- not monumental problems, but simple child behavior and limited budget problems. Reports indicate our suggestions are bringing results.
>
> 1. A teen-age boy, depressed because he couldn't get a job, is assisting with maintenance work and washing automobiles for staff at Henry Booth House.

2. An obese woman, now interested in her sewing, has found as she sews she forgets to 'nibble all day.' Weight loss and improved appearance have so encouraged her that she is ready now to follow a low caloric diet.

3. A shy young mother of four children (23 years old) wanted to save money making clothes for her children but thought her limited free time made it impossible. Making an Easter dress for her daughter so inspired her that she tried to design and make an Easter hat. She shows outstanding ability and imagination -- and has finished two hats and sketched original designs for 8 more for relatives.

The sense of achievement and the praise from and interest of the family is an important factor in the progress of the program. A pretty hat requires hair care, and general appearances are improving.

Not only are the women enthusiastic about the money they are saving (and their husbands, too) but they enjoy the sociability and the fact that they have a worthwhile reason for getting out of their houses for a short period.

Twelve pre-teen girls are responding with equal enthusiasm. Problems of school, family situations and growing-up are casually discussed as they make their 'costumes' for the Henry Booth presentation of 'Around the World in 80 Minutes.' Hawaiian dancers, with grass skirts and flower leis (over play shorts and bras which they made and will use as sun suits all summer), they too, are so enthusiastic that there is a 'waiting list' of those who will start with the next group." 9/

A "Mobile Kitchen" in Milwaukee

Under the joint sponsorship of the home economics extension agent working with representatives of the Department of Agriculture and the Milwaukee Department of Public Welfare, a special demonstration project was organized in the early 1960's to instruct low-income families

---

9/ Freda S. Kehm, "Annual Report of the Director - 1960," Association for Family Living, Chicago, p. 1. See also, "Teaching Newcomers How to Live in the Big City," Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine, March 25, 1962, pp. 46-49.

on the use of donated surplus food. A special trailer, called a "mobile kitchen," was dispatched to designated sections of the city. The location of the trailer was well-publicized in advance of its appearance.[10]

Education for Migrants

A series of courses in formal educational projects sponsored by the Division of Americanization and Adult Education in the Chicago public schools in the late 1950's and early 1960's was deemed successful and carrying strong appeal for the migrant adults for whom the program was intended. Topics covered in these evening courses, some of them offered four nights a week, included the following: child care, personal hygiene and grooming, use of modern household equipment, and the proper method of household cleaning. [11]

An ADC Mothers' Group in Wyoming

In a rural community, a predominantly discussion-type group of ADC mothers convened regularly for 26 meetings between May 1960 and May 1961 under the sponsorship of the Wyoming Department of Public Welfare. This group enlisted the help of eight community resource people under the direction of a trained caseworker, who in this instance functioned as a group leader.

There were four chief purposes which the Wyoming Department of Public Welfare sought to achieve in sponsoring this group. The first aim was to strengthen skills in housekeeping and child care. Another allied aim was to strengthen family life by ventilating and exploring within the group a series of problems concerning marital relationships. In an effort to achieve greater confidence and sophistication in social interaction, coffee-break sessions were planned to take place "at one of the best local cafes." Finally, major stress was placed on developing practical skills in money management and budgeting.

In the course of this project highly specific "lesson plans" were developed, in which information was conveyed by school nurses, speech therapists, a guidance teacher, and a medical technician. Although attendance during the meetings was limited to an average of four to six mothers, it was deemed a significant project in which certain participants received help that was not forthcoming in the regular casework related to children. The progress of one of the mothers is characterized as follows:

---

[10] McGuire, loc. cit.

[11] Edward Warner Brice, Education of the Adult Migrant, Washington, D.C., Office of Education (OE-13012, Bulletin 1961, No. 6), p. 65.

> Soon after Mrs. A. joined the group, improvement was observed. Mrs. A. was very regular in attendance; in fact, she was absent only on one occasion. She, through the group opportunity, was able to contribute ideas and relate experiences. She was able to be more accepting of her unhappy and unsuccessful marital experience. She learned that others have problems. She began to realize that her family responsibility and the well-being of her children were very dependent upon her good health. Mrs. A. had a problem of obesity. In the worker's opinion, this problem was a contributing factor to all her other problems. Resource personnel were able to reach this individual. As of May 1961, Mrs. A., who is 5'2" and weighed 300 pounds had, under supervision of a physician, lost 68 pounds and is still losing. Her mental health is noticeably improved. She can talk about her weight problems. She is determined to continue to do something about it. The general home situation is improved. The economic problems are met through improved money management. She feels more accepted by her relatives, church circles, and society. The goals set forth are partially reached. Individual work had for the most part been unsuccessful. Through the group experiences, positive social relationships were formed. Effective and adequate functioning developed to the point where the individual is utilizing self-help.

Parents of Acting-Out Children

A series of seven meetings with low-income but stable working class parents around problems of acting-out elementary school children was conducted in Philadelphia. 12/ Selected parents were referred to the family life educator by the schools, and 11 mothers agreed to attend the meetings. Each session began with coffee and cake being served after which the leader conducted group discussions following the interests of the participants, with a major stress on parent-child and home-school problems. It is reported that most children exhibited improvement as the discussions proceeded, and that "the most significant gain for the school was the improvement in the relationship between the parent and the principal and teacher." 13/

12/ Gertrude K. Pollak, "New Uses of a Family Life Education Program by the Community," Social Casework, Vol. 44, No. 6 (June 1963), pp. 335-342.

13/ Ibid., p. 339.

Mothers of Mentally Retarded Children

The Pine School project (Parsons, 1960) is a cooperative undertaking, supported by the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station and a number of State agencies. 14/ It was launched in 1957 in an effort to determine how socio-economic factors of everyday living can serve to exacerbate or diminish the effects of "familial mental retardation," that is, retardation in families in the absence of any established organic cause.

In addition to intensive casework services made available to nine families, it was decided to invite mothers to participate in little meetings. It was felt that these meetings might serve to alleviate feelings of loneliness and inadequacy which the social worker, nurse, and home economist identified in the contacts with families and in prior home visits. Meetings took place in the homes of the mothers, and a certain amount of competition was stimulated among the participants in the preparation of refreshments and sprucing up of the premises.

At the first meeting of the group the activity consisted of painting dried weeds to be used as winter bouquets. At subsequent meetings there were baking and housekeeping demonstrations, instruction by a public health nurse in simple health measures such as reading a thermometer, a discussion of a film on child-rearing, and two sessions during which quilts were prepared for use by the children at nap time in the Pine School. The discussion parts of the meeting were kept short and simple, and the essentially social quality of the group was emphasized throughout.

The leaders of the project concluded that the chief success of the mothers' group had to do with giving these fairly limited women a sense of belonging, new friendships, and a more sophisticated awareness of their own place and role in life as mothers and homemakers. With respect to the influence of this aspect of the program on the children themselves, the home management consultant associated with the Pine School project reports as follows:

14/ Mabel H. Parsons, "A Home Economist in Service to Families with Mental Retardation," Children, Vol. 7, No. 5 (September-October 1960), pp. 184-189.

> "How much the awakened interest of these parents in their homes has affected their children is difficult to judge. However, we can make one observation: When six of the younger children of the Pine School project reached the age of eligibility for attendance at the school and their psychological tests were given, only one of them tested low enough to meet the criterion for admission. This is merely an observation, but it raises the question: Could there be a relationship between the stimulation of the parents and Pine School brothers or sisters and the fact that these children had higher IQ scores than their older siblings?" 15/

AIMS OF THE PROJECTS

The most commonly cited general aim of the programs discussed in this report was simply to improve family living. Many practitioners specifically repudiated the aim of causing the low-income clientele deliberately to alter their way of life in conformity with any outside standard. Other practitioners specifically mentioned that it was not their intent to impose middle-class values on low-income individuals.

Specific and more concrete aims were varied, numerous, and often quite precisely focused. As characterized by practitioners and agency leaders themselves, these aims may be summarized as follows:

Improved housekeeping:

a. Making housekeeping more interesting, appealing, and rewarding to untrained housekeepers.
b. Higher standards of cleanliness and day-to-day planning.
c. Greater skill in using modern household appliances.
d. More judicious financial management.
e. Greater skill in making the home more esthetically attractive and cheerful.

Improved inter-family relationships:

a. Deeper understanding of family roles (in particular, that of the father).
b. Greater ability in coping with daily crises of family interaction.
c. More readiness to seek outside help from social agencies in the community.

15/ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

d. More accepting attitudes towards the troublesome or deviant behavior of children.

Improved family-school relationships:

a. More accepting attitudes toward the school as an institution, toward teachers, and toward intellectual processes as promoted by the school.
b. Greater participation in school-community organizations and activities.
c. Providing possibilities for guided observation of children (often associated with pre-school and kindergarten programs).
d. Providing information about child growth, development, and learning.

Improved personal skills:

a. A heightened sense of self-confidence, poise, and personal worth.
b. A more conscious awareness of ways of improving personal appearance and grooming.
c. Greater ability to cope with the daily processes of human interaction (such as in shopping and using community resources entailing face-to-face contacts).
d. More readiness to attempt new tasks demanded by a changing urban environment.

Auspices

Unlike many undertakings in adult education, which often entail highly academic and abstract levels of instruction, parent or family-life education is usually conducted with reference to such basic social roles as work, child-rearing, and recreation. It is possible, however, to conduct parent education in two basic settings, that of the classroom or meeting hall in which information is given and a discussion occurs, or that of an activity program in which some skill is being mastered or some task is being fulfilled. Sometimes these are combined. Often, this difference in setting is paralleled by a difference in aim and auspices the classroom type program being independent and not service-oriented, while the activity program tends to be service-oriented and ancillary.

Thus, an open discussion group for mothers (under the auspices, say, of a department of adult education) which seeks to recruit participants in a given community and is intended to be purely and simply a discussion group would be a common example of what is meant by a non-service oriented and independent parent education project. On the other hand, a "meal-planning workshop" for mothers sponsored by a social service agency of a housing project as a part of a larger effort to improve the homemaking skills of low-income mothers would be an example of parent education as an ancillary undertaking. Probably the sponsors of such a workshop would not think of it primarily as "parent education," although it is possible that much of the actual content and client participation within the workshop would be similar to what occurs in a mothers' discussion group when meal-planning happens to be the topic for discussion.

Parent education with middle-class clients is typically but not exclusively of the independent and non-service oriented variety. PTA groups, child study circles, film forums, discussion groups, and brief workshops devoted to such perennially popular topics as discipline, developmental stages, sex education, or the father's role in the family are directed towards a middle-class clientele which understands and accepts the need for parent education as a desirable end in itself. Often the idea to launch the educational enterprise arises among the clients themselves, who will then proceed to seek out a leader or else organize themselves under a collective or rotating leadership. From our review it was clear that independent, non-service oriented, or client-initiated parent education programs were less frequently found in low-income sectors of the population. Those reported as successful appeared to require unusually persistent efforts on the part of leaders, or else participants who were more highly motivated and accessible to educational influences than the large majority of low-income parents.

In the main the successful and sustaining parent education projects were reported as attached to service programs or host agencies in which the parent education component of the agency's network of specific services was rarely identified in its own right. Thus, in the annual reports of such agencies there would be no section or statistical table under the heading of "parent education."

Six major settings have been identified in which independent as well as service-oriented parent education projects for low-income parents are emerging:

1. Settlement houses and community centers

Many of these programs offered special group or family activity programs which were a part of comprehensive projects designed either to improve basically the tenants functioning in the project, or to rehabilitate multiproblem families. The comprehensive programs combined any or all of the following:

intensive casework, group work with children, the provision of a day care service, community organization activities, and family camping. Also, delinquency prevention programs with the aim of shoring up families in early stages of disorganization or malfunction were sometimes encountered in these settings.

2. Public schools and university extension programs

These were conducted by parent educators in divisions of adult or family-life education, by home economists in demonstration programs, and by visiting teachers and school social workers who occasionally experimented with group programs. Some public school systems, in particular those associated with the Great Cities School Improvement Project, either initiated or indicated a readiness to initiate activity programs for parents that went beyond the group discussion model.

Doubtless there were teachers, principals, and PTA's working quietly in individual schools across the country in an effort to reach deprived and disadvantaged parents, and to bring them into closer contact with school processes. Probably some of these efforts were not identified in the inquiry, although they would most likely fit the definition of parent education with low-income families.

3. Public housing projects

It has long been recognized by advocates of public housing that the mere provision of attractive, sanitary, and adequate living space for disadvantaged families does not automatically guarantee more satisfactory family life or cooperative and friendly neighborhoods. Many current attempts to influence and alter tenant behavior are essentially group parent education projects organized around specific objectives, such as improved homemaking and more responsible child care.

4. Welfare departments and public health clinics

For the most part these programs were designed to reach multiproblem families, such as groups of ADC mothers, where the stress was on homemaking and the physical care of children. 16/ Also, group programs were being conducted by social workers and early-childhood educators under the auspices of day care centers.

5. Private or voluntary social work agencies

These included YMCA's, YWCA's and family life service agencies. Although many of their programs were not specifically directed towards low-income families, the facts of neighborhood clustering according to income and housing levels caused many groups to be comprised almost entirely of disadvantaged parents.

6. Churches

The majority of American religious organizations do not sponsor programs specifically for low-income members, since it is not traditional for churches to make socioeconomic distinctions in formal or official approaches to communicants. Still, a number of religious societies reported sponsoring activities which in effect were intended to attract low-income or multi-problem families. Prominent among these was the Salvation Army. 17/

16/ Cf., Gladys O. White, Alberta D. Hill, and Edna P. Amidon, Improving Home and Family Living among Low-Income Families; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Bureau of Family Services and the Office of Education, May 1962; and Norman W. Paget, Family Life Education Program Profiles (San Bernardino: Kendal Publishing Co., 1961).

17/ For an example of one approach to problems of low-income Americans as expressed by a religious organization, see We Are Christians in an Urban Society, The National Council, Episcopal Church Center, New York City, 1963. For accounts of the Salvation Army's services and programs which reach low-income families, see among others Creators All: The Salvation Army's Report to the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, The Salvation Army, New York (n.d.); The Salvation Army Services to Unmarried Parents and Their Children, Handbook of Information, Commissioners' Conference, New York, N.Y., 1962; Major Mary E. Verner, "Effective Techniques of Communication with Rehabilitation of Hard-to-Reach Out-of-Wedlock Families: Booth-Talbert Clinic and Day Care Program," Paper to the Annual Forum of the National Conference on Social Welfare, May 21, 1963 (mimeographed).

Activities or Group Discussions?

There was fairly widespread agreement among the sources surveyed in this report that the more formal educational methods do not work as effectively as the less formal methods. The following statement from a Cleveland agency is representative of a number of practitioners' viewpoints favoring a more person-to-person and group approach:

> Our experiences in this area indicate that the formal educational approaches such as extension classes, adult education seminars, etc., reach the middle-class families of our area, but do not attract the neediest families. Our most successful work is based on a worker-to-family or worker-to-group, relationship-centered approach rather than a content-centered approach. In other words, a social group work method is used. We have organized groups by two different methods, one a geographically based group of women on a short, high density block where the group is open to any woman of the area and the primary purpose is to develop a range of program interest to group participants; the second, in cooperation with the County Welfare Department and open to recent applicants and recipients of relief. Both of these groups show promise of providing their participants with two essential ingredients for change: (a) motivation and support (b) information and resources.

Another example of the tendency for many low-income groups to concentrate heavily on activity and recreational events is provided in the following statement by a practitioner:

> A YWCA in Charlotte has organized a group of women in a settlement house area. After two years of visiting and struggling, they have a group of about ten. I guess the significant thing about the report from that group is that they have not yet had a program or lesson relating to parent education. Topics covered thus far include: low cost meals, making artificial flowers, slides and movies of other lands, trips to nature museum, talk and free shampoos and sets at beauty school, informal flower arranging, Christmas decorations, bazaar and Christmas gift items. Can it be that their family situation seems hopeless, and they just prefer to forget their problems when away from home?

According to the leaders of the Baltimore Early School Admissions Project, parents of children who live in depressed areas are not positively oriented to the schools, and can not be expected "to gain either enthusiasm or insight through lectures, organized meetings, or other formal 'student' activities which might demand an unrealistic level of scholarship and concentration." 18/

Strictly speaking, almost every program which attempts to reach low-income families does involve some type of group discussion, no matter how brief of minimal. Even lectures or film showings typically allow for a question or discussion period. Thus, it does not seem advisable to think of activity-type or informal programs as constituting an entirely separate category from other activities which might be thought of as discussion groups.

Indeed, a minority of respondents emphatically stressed the possibility of conducting more or less classic discussion groups, similar in format to those commonly encountered in middle-income neighborhoods, among even very low-income clientele. One practitioner asserted strongly: "I don't believe in the point often made that persons of limited educational background and low income are not able to use the discussion group method."

The Child Study Association of America reports an extensive involvement with low-income families in its discussion groups, although precise statistical evidence is not available. "It is the Association's strong impression based on many years of experience in developing programs for parents of all socioeconomic groups, that the low-income parent can -- and does -- make significant use of the group discussion experience." 19/

Types of Activity and Workshop Projects

Sewing classes were frequently mentioned as an especially useful project. They were reported as meeting a number of important needs: the practical desire for clothes and household items, such as curtains,

---

18/ An Early School Admissions Project Progress Report 1962-1963, Baltimore City Public Schools, September 1, 1963 (mimeographed), p. 66.

19/ See Carl A. Scott, "Some Concerns of Parents in Low-Income Groups as Seen in Parent Group Education Programs," paper presented at the May 1963 National Conference on Social Welfare sponsored by the Child Study Association of America and the Family Service Association of America (mimeographed), p. 2.

at low (or no) cost; and the psychological needs for engaging in creative activity and for achieving concrete, observable success. In order to meet such needs, sewing classes for disadvantaged mothers were often conducted in a way that required only a minimum of skill.

Some agencies sponsored organized field trips or expeditions to various neighborhood facilities, such as a supermarket, department store, park, library, or museum. It was suggested that at first the leader might accompany the mothers in order to give them self-assurance, since many of the women have never ventured out of their immediate neighborhood. Later the participants can be encouraged to make such trips on their own.

Another fairly common approach to parent education with low-income groups is through the nursery or play-school in which the parents help professional teachers with planning and carrying out the children's activities, thus affording opportunities to learn new ways in child-rearing. Sometimes this involves guided observation of the children on the part of the mothers, similar to procedures in parent education with middle-income clients.

The following are some among many activities and demonstration type undertakings sponsored by agencies:

a. Sewing groups (both formally and informally structured).
b. Care and maintenance of kitchen and general household utilities.
c. How to clean a stove.
d. Choosing and using household cleaning agents.
e. Making play equipment.
f. Re-upholstering furniture.
g. Meal planning and preparation.
h. Clothing repair and alteration.
i. Organizing bake sales in the neighborhood.
j. Interior decorating.
k. Flower arranging.
l. Organizing children's parties.
m. Gift-wrapping.
n. Family picnics.
o. Family dinners.

Topics Covered in Discussion Groups

Practitioners who advocated discussion groups and reported success with them stressed that they must be planned with great care, and that participants can be brought into the planning process when sufficient enthusiasm is aroused. Discussions which focus on member-perceived day-to-day problems were said to be the most popular.

Other practitioners mentioned the need to follow certain general guidelines in conducting discussion groups, such as "beginning where the parents are," not being too abstract or theoretical, and allowing the topics to emerge informally out of the parents' life experiences as the program unfolds.

According to a few respondents, a topic that sometimes meets with more than ordinary receptivity is sex education relating to the years of youth and early adulthood. In a program sponsored by one family agency in New York State, meetings and classes were scheduled for youth as well as their parents. The response was far beyond the original expectations.

The following are some among many specific topics covered in discussions:

a. Special problems of children (bed wetting, feeding difficulties, weaning, minor illnesses, etc.).
b. Child-rearing without a father in the home.
c. Keeping children out of trouble.
d. Child-bearing (uncertainty about labor and delivery, ambivalence about having baby, problems in using public health clinics, airing old wives' tales about childbirth, as, for example: "If you wear a necklace while pregnant, the baby will be born with a cord around its neck").
e. How to understand our children.
f. Emotional problems of teenagers.
g. Sex education
h. How to enroll a child in school.
i. Money problems (stretching the dollar, planning a family budget, better buying habits).
j. Getting ready for marriage.
k. Husband and wife relationships.
l. How to improve our personalities.
m. How to develop self-confidence.

Making Contact with Potential Clients

Practitioners are generally agreed that it is necessary to be bold and inventively outgoing in order to attract low-income parents to activities and meetings. Various devices are used. The individual home visit, in which the educator extends the invitation and gives ample reassurance that the parent will be welcome despite his cultural differences or lacks, is said to be effective and sometimes essential.

In one severely deprived community in the Southwest, where the population was largely Latin American in background, the educator arrived in an old truck, laden with bolts of brightly colored yard goods. As mothers were urged to gather around she offered them several yards of fabric with which to make things for their homes, and then invited them to participate in a sewing class.

A group worker in a high-rise housing project in New York City used a similar method to bring mothers into the play-school program in which the children were enrolled. When the children were given an assortment of balloons, the bright colors and the children's shrieks of excitement lured the mothers from their apartments to the playground below. Once they were there, the leader then took steps to involve them in the program.

The importance of refreshments as part of the group meetings, especially the early ones, was frequently mentioned. Some practitioners were of the view that these should be kept simple and that they should be planned by the group members themselves with help from the leader. Some leaders then gradually introduce low-cost homemade food items which members can learn how to cook themselves. Refreshments are said to be not only a treat for members but an aid in learning how to entertain in their homes. Practitioners feel that food provides a sense of belonging and of festivity to mothers whose lives have been socially barren. In one program special refreshments were served in honor of a woman who had recently returned to the group after a long illness. This woman made a little speech of thanks, saying, "It sure made it worthwhile to get well."

Some workers averred that low-income families who have experienced social rejection are apt to be especially parochial about where they feel free to assemble. Therefore, it was recommended that early meetings be held on public or semi-public premises in the immediate neighborhood, such as settlement houses or public housing facilities. As members feel more at ease with one another, meetings might then be held in their respective homes. One practitioner suggested that when this occurs it is wise for the leader to guide the hostesses through the intricacies of unaccustomed entertaining, at the same time guarding against the development of competition between hostesses.

According to one group agency, a good starting point for a parent education program is to make invitations by personal telephone calls, announcing that a special party is being held.

Styles and Attributes of Leadership

The majority of our informants as well as the preponderance of published viewpoints, stress that the style of leadership must also be fairly bold and outgoing. The more low-pitched and even passive style of leadership which is sometimes advocated for work among sophisticated and middle-income groups does not appear to be prominently recommended.

Some practitioners and agency administrators believe that the reaching-out approach must be highly assertive if it is to attract clients and to sustain a program through a number of weeks or months. The following, from a Cleveland settlement house, is a typical expression of this viewpoint:

> Our family and parent education program with low-income families (I am referring to the multi-problem family, although the two are not necessarily synonymous) has been limited. It's been a matter of 'inviting' a small number of one parent families to participate in a regularly scheduled family life education group program. We found that individual contacts are essential. The approach to the families has to be positive, assertive and aggressive. It involves a reaching-out kind of service. Relationship between the staff person and the family is extremely important. Parents have responded more readily when their children were involved in our group activities.

A few correspondents specifically attributed lack of success to distant and unconcerned styles of leadership, an inability to identify with day-to-day problems that dominate the lives of low-income parents, and a disregard for establishing an atmosphere of frankness and two-way respect at the outset of the series of contacts. One practitioner elaborates on this view as follows:

> First and foremost, such educational programs can be successful only if theyare offered in a climate of mutual respect and trust. If the project staff in any way convey the impression that they are there to "elevate and bring more desirable standards," the program is bound to suffer. The educator must work hard to

> clarify what the group wants, and help them to achieve understanding in the areas they are struggling with and to find their own solutions and standards. The announcements describing the program must be as clear and understandable as possible.

The following statement by an official of the Detroit Public Schools is a representative summing-up of a viewpoint on the nature of a desirable approach to leadership. It is shared by many leaders and practitioners in the effort to improve public education in depressed inner cities:

> Parent education programs are not only desirable ... they seem essential. But they cannot be of a formal, upgrading nature. And their substance is not in words, to be read and digested. People, intelligent, compassionate, trained personnel, teachers and administrators, are the key to the successful parent, or child, education program. Do-gooders, that is, those who see the lower-socioeconomic person as an aberration from the middle-class archetype American, and reconstruct and correct according to values often alien to the community and the people of the community, these people are destructive; as are the other do-gooders, the ones whose motives and purposes spring from deep hostility toward children, or toward people who are different ethnically or racially from themselves. A combination of intelligence, compassion for all people, and extensive training will produce personnel--teachers, administrators, social workers--who understand what must be done and then understand the ways in which it can be done. A certain percentage of the lower-income families will seize and take advantage of opportunities for vertical mobility--achieving the hallowed middle class. A much larger percentage has no inclination to alter socioeconomic position, but would like very much to make that position a little pleasanter and more habitable. They are most important. They need skills, and they need values, but essentially these skills and values involve working from a redefinition of their position in life. Not a change in that position. Their children, perhaps, will alter, and should always have the opportunity. But for most, the total problem can be summed up in "How can this family become stable and independent of outside aid; its breadwinners get and keep jobs, its children receive a good education?" 20/

20/ Charles S. Mitchell, Great Cities Program for School Improvement, (Detroit Public Schools), letter, August 3, 1962.

Among the individually cited attributes of the good or the successful leader, the following can be mentioned:

a. Enthusiasm for the work.
b. Enthusiasm for living in general.
c. Large amounts of physical energy.
d. Flexibility and the willingness to experiment in new directions.
e. An ability to transmit theoretical matters in practical, everyday language.
f. Comprehension of the cultural characteristics and daily life of low-income people.
g. Understanding of the group behavior patterns of the clients enrolled in the programs.
h. A prevailing poise and sense of dignity.
i. Capacity to perform unpleasant tasks when necessary.
j. A capacity for mothering.
k. Personal integrity and strength of character.
l. Patience.
m. The ability to set firm limits without rancor.
n. A sense of humor.
o. Capacity for tolerance in trying situations.
p. A generally warm personality.
q. An ability to understand, but not necessarily use, the "language of the people."
r. An ability to keep cool in times of crisis.

Training and Skills of Leaders

There was no identifiable consensus among practitioners and administrators concerning the precise training and skills required for successful parent education among low-income parents.

Only occasionally was the view encountered that a particular field or profession (for example, social work, nursing, home economics) offered the preferred background for practitioners. Somewhat more commonly expressed was a viewpoint to the effect that a professional background was highly desirable or even required, but that the specific field was not of determining significance. In any event it is clear that the majority of trained practitioners come from the fields of social work, education, and home economics, not necessarily in that order of prominence.

The view that competent lay personnel (usually meaning without academic or professional training beyond the high school level) can function adequately as practitioners was not an uncommon one. Since the majority of programs surveyed in this report were conducted by professionally trained leaders, we had no way of assessing to what extent lay leaders were involved in projects not covered in our informal survey.

Another view occasionally encountered was that lay people could function effectively, but only under suitable guidance. This view is typified by one family life educator who stated: "I am positive of one thing -- that any program set-up needs to be very carefully supervised by persons who have had adequate training in sociology, in psychology, and family relations and child development." (The opinion herein expressed is not to the effect that the supervising person must be a sociologist, psychologist, etc., but rather that appropriate preparation in these fields must be a part of the training, as it characteristically is in such disciplines as home economics and social work.)

A few informants stressed the value of employing local (so-called "indigenous") leadership. In one city neighborhood, several mothers who were generally well liked and respected were persuaded by the parent educator to form a small team to visit other parents to invite them to the meetings. In another, a university-based parent educator found that disadvantaged families attended an organizing meeting when their own neighbors provided the planning (with the professor's indirect guidance) and the entertainment, including a choir from a store-front church.

Practitioners cited the following specific skills and information, both professional and non-professional, as useful for workers in the field:

a. Knowledge of how to set up and conduct home visits.
b. Ability to keep succinct and accurate written records.
c. Working knowledge of retail store practices and policies in the neighborhood.
d. Awareness of the workings of the "power structure" in the local community.
e. Acquaintance with the various services offered by social agencies in the community.
f. Skill in using the mass media for communicating information.
g. Tested ability to handle people in both a small and a large group situation.
h. Skill in interviewing.
i. Ability to sustain one-to-one contacts with children as well as adults.
j. Ability to refer people to other sources of help in the community.
k. At least elementary knowledge of the ethnic histories of the population groups in the neighborhood.

Each of the following skills was mentioned at least once as helpful but not essential:

a. Skill in using a sewing machine.
b. Ability to drive an automobile.
c. Some knowledge of how to mend and alter clothing.
d. Ability to lead community singing or to play a musical instrument.
e. Experience in conducting children's parties.
f. Experience in babysitting.
g. Practical awareness of special needs of the aged and physically handicapped.
h. Ability to teach and lead group games.
i. Knowledge of simple home nursing for common ailments.
j. Knowledge of cooking, baking, and meal preparation.

Referrals to other services

A few informants pointed out that group parent education is only part of a network of services needed by disadvantaged families. Stressing the importance of readily available individual counseling, they reported that while the majority of group leaders provided a certain amount of informal, individual counseling themselves, some parents needed more intensive, individual help than the leaders had the time or-- in some instances -- the skill to give. The wisdom of simultaneously filling the roles of group educator and personal counselor was questioned.

Referral for individual counseling may proceed more smoothly when caseworker and parent educator are on the staff of the same agency.

A few workers reported that referrals to outside counselors may prove more effective if the group leader accompanies the client to the counselor's office for the first visit. It was felt that this type of guidance might help parents to find the way to community services previously associated with a threatening and unpredictable outside world.

The need for close working relationships with clients, schools, health departments, churches, hospitals, and welfare agencies was pointed out by many practitioners. Such contacts were deemed important in making referrals.

Publications, Films, Mass Media

Through the medium of books, pamphlets, magazines, films, TV, and radio a considerable amount of information and indoctrination is annually directed toward American parents. Among this vast outpouring of materials there are a number of national magazines which are devoted exclusively or almost exclusively to parent guidance and advice. The combined circulation of these publications reaches many millions.

On the basis of our review as well as available studies it is not possible to assess with any precision the extent to which the mass media reach and then influence low-income adults in their role as parents. 21/ There can be no question, however, that in the main the purchasers, readers, and subscribers to the magazines and pamphlets are middle-class parents. Also, these materials are conceived and written in a style and context which almost exclusively assumes an audience of middle-income, socioeconomically stable, and non-marginal (in the cultural sense) adults.

While a few among our informants believe that currently available films and pamphlets could be effective in reaching low-income parents, the majority did not appear to make much use of the mass media in any aspect of the program. One leader affirmed that the written word, even when the content is simple and concrete, is never as effective as the trained, compassionate communicator in the flesh. Another worker suggested that films which combine learning and entertainment and which deal with animal life or family patterns in other cultures may be useful, since they avoid the middle-class stereotypes with which low-income viewers may find it hard to identify. We have no way of knowing, however, to what extent this was actually the case, or with what frequency such films were being used in programs.

A few respondents expressed the view that written materials and films prepared with a low-income, minority status clientele in mind should prove useful. An example of the possibly-negative influence of some of the popular parent guidance literature that is available was provided by one practitioner. This respondent pointed out that almost all the manuals on infant care refer to the newborn baby as being "red," or "pink and white." Yet in all the large cities of our nation, where these materials are distributed, thousands of babies are being born every day who are not pink and white.

21/ A limited and informal survey was made in the Child Life Studies Branch of the Children's Bureau concerning research on efforts to reach and influence poor readers through the written word. There is no firm evidence of successful projects. (See the Child Life Studies Branch memorandum "Publications for 'Slow Readers'," May 5, 1964, mimeographed.)

This bibliography includes only the books, articles, and other documents specifically cited in this report. In addition to these documents, a large number of letters, typewritten informal reports, and interview notes were used in summarizing conclusions derived from the review of parent education activities, and are frequently quoted in the body of the report. These unpublished materials are on file with the Child Life Studies Branch, Division of Research, Children's Bureau.

1. Auerbach, Aline B.: Trends and Techniques in Parent Education: A Critical Review. Child Study Association of America, New York. March 1961.

2. Baltimore City Public Schools: An Early School Admissions Project Progress Report 1962-1963. September 1, 1963. (Mimeographed).

3. Bell, Courtenay, W. and Kaplan, Harvey L.: Public-Voluntary Sponsorship of a Mothers' Group. SOCIAL CASEWORK, 1964, 45, 1, 21-25 (January).

4. Bell, Wendell and Force, Maryanne T.: Social Structures and Participation in Different Types of Formal Associations. SOCIAL FORCES, 1956, 24, 4, 345-350 (May).

5. Biber, Barbara: Basic Assumptions and Goals of Parent Education. /In/ Taking Stock in Parent Education. Proceedings of the 1953 Conference for Workers in Parent Education, Child Study Association of America, New York, 1953.

6. Brager, George: Organizing the Unaffiliated in a Low-Income Area. SOCIAL WORK, 1963, 8, 2, 34-40 (April).

7. Bremner, Robert H.: American Philanthropy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

8. Brice, Edward Warner: Education of the Adult Migrant. OE-13012, Bulletin 1961, No. 6. Washington, D.C. 20201: Office of Education.

9. Brim, Orville G.: Education for Child Rearing. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959.

10. Burck, Gilbert and Parker, Sanford: The Coming Turn in Consumer Credit. FORTUNE, 1956, 53, 3, 99-102, 240, 242, 244, 246-247 (March).

11. Caplovitz, David: *The Poor Pay More - Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families.* New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.

12. Child Study Association of America: Parent Education: Its Ends and Goals. /*In*/ Proceedings of the 1954 Conference for Workers in Parent Education. New York: 1954.

13. Chilman, Catherine S. and Kraft, Ivor: Helping Low-Income Parents Through Parent Education Groups. CHILDREN, 10, 4, 127-132 (July-August 1963).

14. *Community Services and Family Relocation*. The Report of a Demonstration Project Carried out under the Provisions of the Housing Act of 1954. Washington, The District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency, April 1964.

15. Cremin, Lawrence A.: *The Transformation of the School*: *Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

16. Cubberley, Ellwood P.: *Public Education in the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919.

17. Dewey, John: *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916.

18. Douglas, Paul H.: The New Deal and the Family. JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN, 1934, 28, 1, 9-14 (October).

19. Duhl, Leonard J. (ed.).: *The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis.* New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963.

20. Frank, Lawrence K.: The Beginnings of Child Development and Family Education in the Twentieth Century. Edna Noble White Memorial Lecture, October 30, 1961. Detroit: Merrill-Palmer Institute, 1962.

21. Gist, Noel P. and Halbert, L.A.: Urban Society. 4th ed. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1956.

22. Guinessy, Mildred W. and Lewis, Harold: Letter, CHILDREN, 11, 2, 80 (March-April 1964).

23. Hanna, Eleanor and Mallory, Janet: ADC Mothers Meet to Reduce Problems. August 1963 (Typewritten).

24. Hill, M. Esther: Helping Low-Income Parents Through Homemaking Consultants. CHILDREN, 10, 4, 132-136 (July-August 1963).

25. Johnson, Myra T. and McLarnan, Georgiana: Demonstrating an Approach to Improving Substandard Housekeeping. Nashville, Tennessee. (Mimeographed) No date.

26. Katona, George: The Powerful Consumer. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960.

27. Kehm, Freda S.: Annual Report of the Director -- 1960. Association for Family Living, Chicago, Ill.

28. Keyserling, Leon H.: Poverty and the Economy. THE NATION, 1965, 200, 23, 615-617 (June 7).

29. Lakeview Cooperative Play Program. Report of Activities October 1960 to May 1961. East Chicago, Inc. (Mimeographed).

30. Lewis, Harold: Etiology of Poor Housekeeping Among Low-Income Public Housing Families. JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY, 1964, 26, 2, 224-225 (May).

31. Lewis, Harold and Guinessy, Mildred: Helping the Poor Housekeeping Family in Public Housing. Friends Neighborhood Guild, Philadelphia. September 1963. (Mimeographed).

32. Marburger, Carl L.: Basic Considerations for Educational Planning for Children in Depressed Urban Areas. Report Detroit Michigan. (July 12, 1962). (Mimeographed).

33. McGuire, Marie C.: Our Cities Need You. JOURNAL OF HOME ECONOMICS, 1963, 55, 2, 99-103 (February).

34. McLarnan, Georgiana and Neiswender, Francis B.: Social Group Work With Young, Young Married Couples. The Elizabeth Nairn Memorial Paper presented at the Middle Tennessee Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, April 1961 (Mimeographed).

35. Miller, Herman P.: Rich Man, Poor Man. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1964.

36. Morrow, Evelyn: The Family Service Education Program. East Chicago, Ind.: Purdue-Calumet Development Foundation, 1958.

37. National Council, Episcopal Church Center: We Are Christians in An Urban Society. New York City. 1963.

38. National Society for the Study of Education: Preschool and Parent Education. Twenty-eighth Yearbook. Bloomington, Ill.: Public School Publishing Co., 1929.

39. Osborne, Ernest G.: What Is A Parent Educator? CHILD STUDY, 1956, 33, 4, 4-9 (Fall).

40. Paget, Norman W.: Family Life Education Program Profiles. San Bernardino: Kandal Publishing Co., 1961.

41. Parsons, Mabel H.: A Home Economist in Service to Families With Mental Retardation. CHILDREN, 7, 5, 184-189 (September-October 1960).

42. Pollak, Gertrude K.: New Uses of a Family Life Education Program By the Community. SOCIAL CASEWORK, 1963, 44, 6, 335-342 (June).

43. Reissman, Leonard: Class, Leisure, and Social Participation. AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 1954, 19, 1, 76-84 (February).

44. Rogers, Muriel Nelson: A Group Educational Program for Marginally Adjusted Families. SOCIAL CASEWORK, 1962, 43, 4, 178-184 (April).

45. Ross, Ronald: South Dakota Indian Families Move Up to New Housing. EXTENSION SERVICE REVIEW, 1963, 24, 6, 125-127 (July).

46. Salvation Army. Creators All: The Salvation Army's Report to the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth. No date.

47. The Salvation Army Services to Unmarried Parents and Their Children. Handbook of Information, Commissioners' Conference. New York, N. Y. 1962.

48. Scott, Carl A.: Some Concerns of Parents in Low-Income Groups as Seen in Parent Group Education Programs. Paper presented at the May 1963 National Conference on Social Welfare, Sponsored by the Child Study Association of America and the Family Service Association of America. (Mimeographed).

49. Teaching Newcomers How to Live in the Big City. Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine, 1962, 46-59 (March 25).

50. United Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit: A Study of Adult Education in Detroit Agencies and Organizations -- Public and Voluntary. Detroit, Michigan, March 1960.

51. U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Cooperative Extension Service Work With Low-Income Families in Low-Rent Public Housing* Federal Extension Service (ESC-548). August 1963.

52. U.S. Department of Commerce: *Public and Private Debt and Corporate Finance*. Office of Business Economics (OBE 65-30), May 24, 1965.

53. U.S. House of Representatives: *The State of the Union -- Address* of *the President of the United States*. Doc. No.1, 88th Cong., 1st Sess. January 14, 1963.

54. Verner, Major Mary E.: Effective Techniques of Communication With Rehabilitation of Hard-to-Reach Out-of-Wedlock Families: Booth-Talbert Clinic and Day Care Program. Paper read at the Annual Forum of the National Conference on Social Welfare, May 21, 1963 (Mimeographed).

55. White, Gladys O., Hill, Alberta D., and Amidon, Edna P.: *Improving Home and Family Living Among Low-Income Families*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Bureau of Family Services and the Office of Education, May 1962.

56. Witmer, Helen L.: *The Field of Parent Education: A Survey from the Viewpoint of Research*. New York: National Council of Parent Education 1934.

57. Wright, Charles R. and Hyman, Herbert H.: Voluntary Associaton Memberships of American Adults: Evidence from National Sample Surveys. AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 1958, 23, 3, 284-294 (June).

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1967 O - 263-455

AUTHORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A large number of educators, specialists, and administrators in various fields provided essential information in the compilation of sections of this report. We acknowledge with gratitude assistance offered by the following:

Salvatore Ambrosino, Mineola, N.Y.; Sonia Archer, Bronx, N.Y.; Milton Babitz, Sacramento, Calif.; Francis Bosworth, Philadelphia, Pa.; Barbara Bradshaw, Raton, N. Mex.; Frank Catliota, Cleveland, Ohio; Mary Dowery, New York, N.Y.; Selma Fraiberg, Metairie, La.; Marjorie A. Gibbs, East Lansing, Mich.; Paul H. Glasser, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Armin Grams, Detroit, Mich.; George Green, Philadelphia, Pa.; Esther Hill, Philadelphia, Pa.; Paul Jans, Philadelphia, Pa.; Myra T. Johnson, Nashville, Tenn.; Frances Jordan, Raleigh, N.C.

Also Freda S. Kehm, Chicago, Ill.; Richard K. Kerckhoff, Washington, D.C.; Ann M. Krost, Minneapolis, Minn.; Emeric Kurtagh, Detroit, Mich.; Elizabeth Lewis, Cleveland, Ohio; Georgiana McLarnan, Nashville, Tenn.; Elta Majors, Auburn, Ala.; Edna Martin, Seattle, Wash.; Esther Middlewood, Lansing, Mich.; Frances S. Miller, San Francisco, Calif.; Charles S. Mitchell, Detroit, Mich.; Jeanne S. Moehn, College Park, Md.; Fay Moeller, Storrs, Conn.; Bernice Moore, Austin, Tex.

Also Owen W. Morgan, Pacific Oaks, Calif.; Grace O'Neill, New York, N.Y.; Evelyn Pickarts, Los Angeles, Calif.; Gertrude Pollak, Philadelphia, Pa.; Esther E. Prevey, Kansas City, Mo.; Sooch Rannells, Washington, D.C.; Barbara Roberts, Philadelphia, Pa.; Eva W. Scully, Phoenix, Ariz.; Robert L. Sutherland, Austin, Tex.; Katharine Whiteside Taylor, Baltimore, Md.; Murtis H. Taylor, Cleveland, Ohio; Ruth S. Tefferteller, New York, N.Y.; Irma Unruh, Detroit, Mich.; Paul Weinandy, Syracuse, N.Y.; Georgia Lee Wren, Fresno, Calif.; Jane E. Wrieden, New York, N.Y.; Bernice Wright, Syracuse, N.Y.

THE LIBRARY OF
DEC 14 1967